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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

PARENT VOLUNTEERS: FIVE PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES

by

MARILYN ANN MOCHORUK

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF MASTER OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL, 1988

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled, PARENT VOLUNTEERS: FIVE PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES, submitted by MARILYN ANN MOCHORUK in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF EDUCATION.

Lorne Everett Turner
(Supervisor)

James Blakey

Date: October 3, 1988

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Matt and Louise Mochoruk and to my advisor, Dr. Lorene Everett Turner.

ABSTRACT

As extensive as it is, the body of literature on parent involvement in children's schooling contains little information regarding the viewpoints of parents. An important question that the reseach has overlooked and one that prompted this study is "How do parents benefit from their volunteer experience?" An ethnographic approach was utilized to search for deeper insight into what the volunteer experience meant to each of the five parents who were selected from two designated community schools to participate in this study. The nature of parent volunteers' experience was explored in order to discover more about what they do, how they really feel about volunteering, what it means to them, why they are involved in their children's school, and why they continue to be involved .

The researcher became a part of the parent volunteers' setting by observing and actively participating in their daily activities. As much detail as possible about the parents' involvement was recorded in the form of field notes, by collecting relevant documents, and by interviewing them. Each parent volunteer was interviewed weekly at least five times, following each half day of observation. The interviews were transcribed and interpreted by the researcher. The interpretations were regularily checked with the informants to be sure they were correct. The transcripts and field notes were read by a second reader to insure validity and check the researcher's interpretations.

Upon analyzing the data, several important aspects to the parents' involvement arose. These were divided into the following categories: description of how the parents were recruited and why they initially got involved in their child's education, identification of the various tasks parents performed, and the reasons why parents continue to volunteer. A brief report, summarizing the data was written for each parent and verified by them.

While spending extensive time with the parents the researcher was able to have several conversations and informal interveiws with staff members at both schools.

Although not the major focus, these educators' perceptions of parental involvement was included in the report.

The study concludes with some recommendations that would lead to more effective implementation of parent volunteers and some suggestions for further research which would contribute to a greater understanding of parent involvement.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

There is little doubt in the minds of many educators that parents play a very important role in the education of their children. Educators are strongly in favor of parent involvement, yet it is not at all clear what they mean by the term. Parent involvement for some teachers and parents may mean providing children with their basic needs; for others it might mean attending a host of traditional school functions such as the Christmas concert and track and field day; for others, participation might entail the organization of fundraising events, tutoring children, or supervising children on field trips. One way to define parent involvement is by grouping the activities in which parents take part.

In the literature on parent involvement authors have defined the term by grouping the activities into four or five basic ways in which parents are involved in their children's education (Epstein, 1987; Everett-Turner, 1986; Hepworth-Berger, 1987; Henderson et al., 1986; Honig, 1987; Lyons et al., 1984). Henderson et al., (1986) have grouped the activities into five basic roles: parents as partners, collaborators and problem solvers, audience, supporters, and co-decision makers. These roles will be discussed in detail in Chapter Two.

In the study paper prepared by Alberta Education entitled, "Partners in Education: Principles for a New School Act" (1985), four basic principles pertaining to parental involvement are identified. They are the parents rights:

1. To protect the interests of their children.

2. To choose the education for their children, with the Province's specification of adequate educational standards.

3. To participate in the education of their children.

4. To ensure their children participate in the educational system.

(p. 5)

The major focus of this study is to explore in depth the third principle, parents' participation in the education of their children.

Several studies have shown that there are a wide range of ways parents can participate, but no matter what the range of activities, the scope of the participation or the time commitment, parental participation in the educational process benefits both children and parents. These studies have also indicated how children benefit from parents being involved in children's education either at home or by being actively involved in the school. (Friesen, 1986; Hepworth-Berger, 1987; Honig, 1979; Lopate et al., 1970). The studies have concluded that children do better in school when they perceive parental interest and involvement in their education. Experiments involving parents showing an interest in their children's schooling by discussing their day at school, by reading to them at home, helping them with homework, being involved in the classrooms and in the decision-making processes of the school, have resulted in significantly increased levels of self-esteem and motivation to learn, improved academic attitude, and higher levels of reading achievement by children. Parental involvement in the learning process helps children develop respect for school, individual, and property rights as well as an improved self-image that enhances reading achievement (Larrick 1976; Lopate et al., 1970; Rich 1976).

With parent volunteers in the classrooms, teachers have more time for individual students. Many teachers believe that the presence of parents volunteering in school also improves the public image of the school and as a result teachers feel good about their own

association with school (Durno, 1979). As Lopate et al. (1970) note in their review of literature pertaining to parental involvement:

> Educational research indicates that when parents of school children are involved in the process of education, their children are likely to achieve better. This heightened achievement may be due to the lessening of distance between the goals of the school and goals of the home and to the positive changes in teacher's attitudes resulting from the greater sense of accountability when parents of their students are visible in the schools. The child may also achieve better because he has an increased sense of control over his own destiny when he sees his parents actively engaged in decision making in the school. (p.148)

Indeed, a great deal of research supports the value and necessity of parental involvement. It focuses on what the parent can do for the school, children, and teachers but, tends to ignore the effect volunteering has on the volunteer himself or herself. While the benefits to education are clear, little consideration has been given to why parents volunteer. There is a definite need to seriously investigate and analyze why parents volunteer and how educators can help make this a meaningful experience for parents. It has been cited in the literature that the child, the teacher, and the school benefit from parental involvement. Although research has not focused on exploring the benefits that parents gain by volunteering, the literature indicates that there should also be benefits for parents. "Traditionally, however, parent involvement has revolved around the welfare of the children or that of the school. The fact that parents themselves might benefit from the involvement has been seen as secondary" (Seefeldt, 1985, p. 98).

I feel that because parents do play a major role in providing children with an effective education and have an impact on their children's schooling we cannot continue to ignore how the parents are benefiting from their involvement. Most educators value parent volunteers and want them to continue assisting them. If parents are going to want to continue to help in the schools their needs must be acknowledged, and they must be given the opportunity to share how they are feeling about volunteering, why they are

involved, what they are enjoying, and how they are benefiting. It is crucial that educators listen to the voices of parents so that meaningful and effective involvement is maintained.

The Context of the Study

Having worked with parent volunteers in my Grade One and Two classrooms for five years, I have often reflected on all the benefits the children, the school and myself, as a teacher have received from parents who were actively involved in their children's education. For example:

..... I witnessed several times the joy in Jayce's face (Jayce was a child from a family of nine) as his best friend's mom sat down with him in the reading corner to help him write a story.

.....I remember the expression on the childrens' faces as they tasted the Christmas chocolates that Christy's mom helped them make.

.....I recall our trip to Round Lake and how determined my students were to catch a fish after two fathers gave them a quick lesson on "how to catch a fish"

.....I recollect Jamie's mother demonstrating the art of Japanese print-making. The children were so intrigued watching her and more than eager to do the print-making themselves.

I know the value of parent volunteers! I know how my students felt and benefited by having volunteers in my classroom. As the teacher I benefited in numerous ways. For example, when parents came into the classroom on a regular basis I would get to know them well enough that they would share personal information about characteristics, habits, learning style, and behavior of their child. I was able to spend more time with individual students, and received the satisfaction of feeling that my work

as a teacher was not only appreciated, but also understood by the parents. But, what about the parents?

Although research has not focused on exploring the benefits that the parents themselves gain by volunteering, they are of equal importance. If parents are to continue to volunteer their time to be involved in schools, educators need to know how parents feel about volunteering. What meaning do parents give their experiences in school? What keeps them involved? In order to answer these questions and really gain a better understanding of how they benefit it seemed necessary to put myself into their situation and come to an understanding of their experience as parent volunteers.

The Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to discover as much as possible about how parents feel about their experience as volunteers in their children's school. This study focused on five parents' perception of what they experienced. An attempt was made to search for deeper insight into what this experience had meant to each of the parents. The nature of parent volunteers' experience was explored in order to discover more about what they do, how they really feel about volunteering, what it means to them, why they are involved in their childrens' school, and why they continue to be involved.

In order to gain a deeper insight into what this experience had meant for each of the parents I immersed myself into their situations and used the following questions as a guide to the development of the study and analysis of the data:

1. Why do parents initially volunteer?
2. What tasks are parents involved in and how appropriate are they deemed to be by the parents?

3. Why do parents stay involved /what makes the volunteer experience worthwhile?

4. What are some concerns that parents have about the volunteer experience?

5. What do educators need to know in order to keep parents meaningfully involved?

Definitions

Designated Community School

This is a school where,

> with the endorsation of the School Board in coopertion with the other local authorities on behalf of the community, there is formal commitment to the use of the educational process for both individual and community betterment. There is also a formal commitment to consciously orient the school to the community it serves. (IDCSC, 1983, p. 23).

Parent Involvement

Although there are currently different views held on what parent involvement is I choose the following one to use in this study. It was the most inclusive.

> any activity which brings parents into a special relationship with their child, the child's teacher, school, or community through which the parent is enabled to assist their child's development and to experience personal growth (Alberta Education, 1984, p. 14).

Delimitations of the study

The study was carried out in two elementary designated community schools within a large urban center. I chose community schools because of their orientation, they would provide a situation in which parents would be given a greater opportunity to become involved. While representation of what was happening in those two locations were not generalizable, I was able to observe a wide range of volunteer activities and felt that they were representative of the parents' involvement in these schools. Five parents were chosen

to enable me to do a thorough, indepth study of parents' perceptions of their experience as volunteers.

Organization of the Thesis

This chapter has provided the context in which the study was conducted and why it was important for the me to explore the parent volunteer experience. The purpose and the limitations of the study have been provided. Chapter two summarizes the related literature, while the third chapter discusses the methodology used. Chapter four reports the findings and discusses the analysis of data. The fifth chapter contains a summary of the study, the recommendations and implications, and some suggested directions for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

Background and Literature Review

Parent involvement has always been a part of our educational tradition. Historically, parents have cared for, taught, trained, and disciplined children as a part of their socialization process. Philosophers and educators such as Rousseau, Froebel, and Pestalozzi recognized and promoted the role parents have in child development (Hepworth-Berger, 1987). Contemporary education bears the marks of their influence.

Historical events have shaped the degree of parental involvement as well as the kinds of roles that are assigned to parents at the present time. The use of parent volunteers in American schools has a history that dates back to the very first colonial schools. These schools were an integral part of the community and to a great extent were administered by parent volunteers. The ideas from the colonial schools influenced the "community schools" that began to appear in the 1930s with one of the first community school programs beginning in Flint, Michigan in 1935. It was at this time that the "community school" was seen as the product of a shift from the progressive school idea of John Dewey, where a child-centered curriculum was stressed, to a life-centered program" (Prout, 1977, p. 9).

As indicated by Minzey and LeTarte (1979) four practices emerged in the early days of the community school movement. The one that seems pertinent to this study is that "the quality of education provided for the children is enhanced when a close relationship between school and community is established" (p. 8). Schools throughout the United States started to implement the practices of the Flint Community School in the 1940's and included in these practices was parent involvement.

In the 1950's there was a diminishing focus on parental involvement as society became absorbed in science and technology. Parents were regarded as unimportant in the teaching process of their children and educators had complete control over the

educational content and delivery of programs. Many parents were afraid of both the school and teacher and felt excluded from their children's education. This viewpoint changed during the 1960's as it became apparent that many children were experiencing real difficulties when they entered the school system. It was recognized that the home setting was paramount in children's preschool life experiences and clearly affected a child' s progress at school.

In 1965 the United States government funded Head Start programs in an attempt to overcome the deficit in children's home backgrounds. The programs were designed to assist economically disadvantaged, preschool children develop the skills necessary for success in subsequent educational activities. Parental involvement in these programs was mandated and became the first large-scale effort to involve parents in the educational experiences of their children. Head Start continued to flourish with emphasis on parent participation. The involvement of parents in this program showed public school educators the valuable contribution parents can make to the school and their children's education and it had a marked effect on public schools. During the sixties several features of Head Start, such as parent participation, were being replicated by other school programs. (Hepworth-Berger, 1987).

By the 1970's similar concerns in Alberta resulted in Preventive Social Services supporting Parent-Child Development programs similar to Head Start. Parental involvement was a major focus of the program and parents participated in the following areas:

1. Participation in the process of making decisions about the nature and operation of the program through the local committee.

2. Participation in the classroom as volunteers, observers or paid employees.

3. Participation with the staff in discussions of the ways in which a parent can contribute to the child's development at home.

4. Participation in educational activities for the parents which they have helped to develop (e.g. Family Life Education)

5. Participation in an ongoing evaluation of the Parent-Child Development project.

6. Participation in developing new services to assist parents in the community in child development and family life. (Everett, 1971, p. 3).

Everett (1971) reported that because of parents' involvement in the program they are able to gain a greater understanding of the individuality inherent in each of their children, learned what enhanced their child's development and have a more satisfactory relationship with their children. Various claims were made in favour of the use of parent volunteers focusing on the benefits to the child. The successful involvement of parents in the Parent-Child Development program inspired other education programs to involve parents.

In Alberta, in 1973 Early Childhood Services (ECS) was established under the joint auspices of the departments of Health and Social Development; Culture, Youth and Recreation; Advanced Education, and Education. In the early 1970's these departments studied the research that was done during the 1960's documenting the crucial importance of the first eight years of life.

> At no other period is the child so susceptible and responsive to positive environmental influence which can enhance and expand his development. Environmental influences, however, if sterile or inappropriate, may well have negative effects on a child's intelligence, motivation and ability to learn, concept of himself, relationship with others, and on later health and education achievements. A suitable environment during the first few years of a child's life can provide nourishment for feelings of self-worth and sense of self-respect, motivation, initiative, ability to learn and to achieve (Government of Alberta, 1973, p. 1.).

After examining the current research, representatives from the various departments met and developed a program that would meet the needs of children in Alberta between the ages of 0 to 8 years. They believed that there should be opportunities for the young children and their parents to develop their abilities and to maximize their potential. The

main purpose of Early Childhood Services is to strengthen the sense of dignity and self-worth within the young child and his/her family. Along with this major goal, ECS programs strive to achieve the following eight goals :

1. To contribute to the development of a positive self-concept in young children. This includes the knowledge, acceptance, and appreciation of oneself as an individual and an acceptance and appreciation of others as individuals.

2. To enhance the physical development of young children. This includes the provision of adequate health care, particularly nutrition and dental care, and the development of gross motor, fine motor, and perceptual motor skills.

3. To enhance the emotional, social, and moral development of young children. This includes the experience and expression of feelings, the demonstration of independence and the development of positive relationships with others.

4. To enhance the intellectual development of young children. This includes the development of young children. This includes the development of thinking processes and the acquisition and use of language.

5. To enhance the creative development of young children. This involves the use of past experience to develop new ideas, novel approaches or original products and includes the expression of self through creative thought, language, music, movement, drama, and art.

6. To contribute to the involvement of parents in their children's education. Involvement includes a variety of ways for parents to take part in the development, implementation, and evaluation of programs.

7. To enhance the competence of staff by providing opportunities to acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills required to develop, implement and evaluate programs whcih are consistent with the philosophy of ECS.

8. T o contribute to a comprehensive, coordinated system of early childhood services which includes:

a) providing opportunities for individuals, families, and communities to identify needs as they relate to young children and to work cooperatively toward meeting these needs.

b) identifying gaps in services for young children and their families.

c) using existing services for young children and their families.

d) developing and providing required services.

e) planning and implementing a coordinated delivery of services. (Alberta Education, 1984, p. 5).

Since its inception in 1973, ECS has maintained that parents are agents in the child's development and the child will develop his full potential only if the program has the full support of the parent. One of the eight goals set out by ECS is "to contribute to the involvement of parents in their children's eduction. Involvement includes a variety of ways for parents to take part in the development, implementation, and evaluation of programs" (Alberta Education, 1984, p. 5). This philosophy has acknowledged the important role parents play in the education of their children and has resulted in high levels of parent involvement in early childhood programs. A great deal of credit must be given to ECS for demonstrating the importance of involving parents and how they can be effectively utilized in educating children.

"By 1975, the impact of the Community Education movement, along with the growing number of schools in the province which considered themselves to be community schools, prompted action within the Alberta government circles" (Osborne, 1982, p. 51), This resulted in the development of an Interdepartmental Community School Committee (IDCSC) which consisted of representation from Alberta Advanced Education and Manpower, Department of Eduction, Department of Culture and Department of Recreation, Parks and Wildlife. A number of studies were generated by the IDCSC between 1976 - 1980 to delineate the community school concept and establish criteria to be met in order to become a designated community school.

The IDCSC established ten dimensions, of which a major one is the involvement of parents, that must be met before a school would be granted the status of a community school. These dimensions are listed in the Alberta document # 35 and are as follows:

1. The school curriculum is consciously oriented towards the community.

2. There is an effective involvement of parents and other community members in helping to develop the curriculum of the school and in helping teachers through appropriate voluntary service.

3. A collegial atmosphere is encouraged and parents and other community people are regarded as allies.

4. Everyone is considered a potential teacher--the faculty includes teachers, working in co-operation with each other, and community adults and students.

5. Everyone is considered a potential learner--all members of the community, including pre-schoolers and adults of all ages are potential learners, though the education of the young is the priority.

6. Inter-agency Co-operation--the school staff and students are active in inter-agency co-operative activities.

7. Facility Adaptation--school and community facilities are adapted for community education purposes.

8. School facilities are open for community use.

9. Community Issues and Problems--school staff encourage students to study community issues and problems.

10. A vital goal of school personnel and students is to foster a sense of community. (Interdepartmental Community School Committee, 1983, p.1).

The development of designated community schools in Alberta in the 1980's has promoted the use of parent volunteers within a broader range of educational settings. Community schools play a major role in increasing the opportunities for community involvement in education.

"Educators in community schools believe that the presence of volunteers in the school gives more continuity in learning between the schools and its surrounding community" (Durno, 1979, p. 10). They believe that the most basic education of children takes place not at school but at home. Their basic life values, their perceptions of self and others are formed primarily in the home. Work by Kelly (1974) reinforces this belief that "without parental involvement, these values and their behavioral expressions can only be slightly modified, for what is taught in school becomes meaningful only when parents are interested and involved in their child's school learning" (p. 14).

There has been considerable research indicating that parent involvement effects in a positive fashion the learning and development of the child (Gordon, 1979), Lopate et al. (1970), Friesen (1986), Honing (1979), Hepworth-Berger (1987), Larrick (1979), Rich (1976), Kelly (1974), and Whaley (1973) have identified several ways in which children benefit by having their parents involved in their education. Whaley (1973) pointed out that "the child benefits from having someone who can spend time with him individually, who can listen to him read, who can help him with his math problems, who can be concerned with his problems" (p. 8). The studies discussed by Hepworth-Berger and Lopate et al. lend support to the idea that having parents involved can make a difference in student academic achievement and social development. They believe students have much to gain from the additional personal relationships provided by volunteer parent involvement and it is recognized as an important element in a child's success and an asset to teachers, schools, and communities.

Johnson (1986) cites some distinct advantages of getting parents involved. He believes that strong parent involvement maintains a sense of pride in the school and that parents send positive messages about the school throughout the community. Safran (1974) indicated that, "with effective and creative parent involvement, any school can be the catalyst for a community's improvement--or survival" (p. 4). Johnson (1986) also mentioned that when parents take an interest in their child's schooling it has a subtle effect

on teachers--the teachers try harder to do a good job and the effectiveness of the school pogram is enhanced. Many teachers appreciate the greater number and variety of classroom materials that are made by the parents. Parent involvement allows teachers to gain insight and knowledge about the child's needs and enhances their understanding about the community served by the school. Safran (1974) stated, "parent involvement opens up opportunities for dialogue between the providers and consumers of educational services, encouraging teachers to recognize other perceptions of what they do" (p. 3).

Another area that has been researched quite extensively is the role that parents play in their children's education. Along with the roles parents play the types of activities they are involved in have been documented. Some researchers have depicted parental roles in the form of a ladder or on a continuum. Cervone and O'Leary (1982) stated, "We see parent involvement as falling along a continuum that stretches from activities in which the parent is the passive recipient of information to activities in which the parent is an active partner in the educational process" (p. 48). On the other hand, Ira Gordon (1979) does not see parent involvement roles categorized in the form of a ladder and claims that the "ladder implies a hierarchy--that is, that one role is more important than another" (p. 9). Rather he depicts parent roles forming a wheel. The wheel has six spokes and implies equivalence--that is, each spoke is necessary. "Some people are comfortable as classroom volunteers, others as decision makers, others simply as recipients of information or observers" (p. 9). Gordon stresses the importance that there must be parents playing all of these roles in order for the wheel to turn efficiently.

Henderson et al. (1986) have grouped parent activities in which parents take part into five basic roles: partners, collaborators and problem solvers, audience, supporters, and co-decision makers. I will briefly discuss these roles in more detail and provide examples of the types of activities that exemplify each role.

1. Parents as Partners

The most basic involvement of parents is providing for their children's food, clothing, shelter, health, safety, and general well-being. Parents register their child and insure that he or she is properly dressed, gets to school on time, and attends each day. They pay for school fees and purchase required supplies. This type of involvement where parents perform basic obligations for their children's education and social development is engaged in by almost all parents.

2. Collaborators and Problem Solvers

This type of involvement includes parents reading the school newsletters, reading to their child, taking time to ask children about their day at school, showing an interest in what happens during the school day and viewing the work they bring home. A major aspect of the parents' role as an effective collaborator, is its potential to help school personnel resolve problems that may arise with a child's learning or behavior. Parents need to be promptly alerted to the difficulty and called in as consultants to figure out, with the teacher, what to do about the problem. The parents support at home what happens in school and reinforce the school's efforts with their child.

3. Audience

The parents' role here is to passively listen, observe, applaud, and occasionally ask questions. The first two roles that I just described can be fulfilled by parents essentially from their homes. However, there are certain events that draw the parents into the school. In the role as audience parents would attend such events as, "get acquainted night", concerts, plays, exhibitions, picnics, athletic events, and awards night. Parents attend and appreciate the school's and their children's performances and productions. By attending such events the parents gain personal knowledge of the school and the children usually feel good about their parents' showing interest in the place where, and people with whom, they spend so much of each weekday.

4. Supporters

In this role parents are actively involved in the school. They provide a wide range of volunteer assistance, both to their own children's teachers and to the school as a whole. Parents (usually mothers, although there seems to be an increasing number of fathers) may do various tasks such as providing tutoring to children who have special needs, working in the library, sharing their special expertise in enrichment programs, doing various clerical tasks, making attendance phone calls, organizing and planning school events such as fund raising-events, which support the school by paying for special equipment or programs that are not in the school's budget.

5. Co-decision Makers

Parents share in voicing opinions and jointly making policy decisions. Parents serve on various special committees that are working towards solving problems such as discipline or safety, helping to develop certain curriculum areas, or having a voice in budget planning meetings. Many schools have established a parent advisory group which gets involved in significant school-related areas such as, the budget, how funds should be raised and allocated, and how parents are to participate in school activities. The parent's recommendations are listened to and on occasion, lead to action. To legitimately fit this category there should be some evidence that the group's advice has actually influenced decisions made by district or school staff.

Williams and Chavkin (1986) and Kahn (1987) elaborate on the range of activities parents may be involved in. For example, attending "open house" functions, "meet the teacher night", and concerts, participating in parent/teacher conferences about children's progress, serving as chaperons for school trips and events, organizing fundraising events to support school needs, taking part in the evaluation of students, having a voice in school budget planning, helping to develop the school's curriculum, doing clerical work such as

typing and collating, helping to set school goals, and developing school policies on parent-related or child-related matters such as homework and discipline.

Not all parents will want to be activley involved at school and it may not be possible or appropriate for them to be actively involved (Henderson, et. al, 1986). Birnie (1980), Epstein (1988), and Friesen, (1986) provide extensive lists of ways to involve parents who prefer to stay home. The lists include: playing family games that relate to school work; sewing bean bags, puppets, and costumes for concerts; baking for room parties and special holidays; cutting out and tracing patterns; making learning games; collating student booklets; and taking care of the classroom pet on the weekends and holidays. Teachers could share ideas with the parents on how they might take advantage of the home setting, routines, and activities to create learning and problem-solving opportunities. Friesen (1986) elaborates on ways parents can encourage self-concept development, language development, sensory awareness, physical development, concept development, and a positive attitude towards school.

Williams and Chavkin (1986) surveyed a group of 726 elementary principals to gain an understanding of what they perceived the role of parents to be. The results of their survey suggest that "elementary school principals support the general idea of parent involvement but are less sanguine about its breadth and scope, indicating greatest support for the more traditional roles" (p. 3). However, we must realize that families are changing. Often both parents are working and with the increase of single parent families it is critical "that we recognize that traditional activities which in the past brought parents into the schools during the day--plays, parties, and field trips --no longer fit with the life-style of many parents today" (Kahn, 1987 p.10). Kahn (1987) stressed that educators must keep in mind the special needs of working parents and be sensitive to the needs of single parents.

Just as students differ widely in their needs and interests, so do parents. Every parent has individual interests, talents, personal philosophies, time constraints, and

commitments. In view of this, it is impossible to develop a norm from which to work. Williams and Chavkin (1986) note that "parent programs must be planned and developed to accommodate this range of parent characteristics" (p. 5). In other words, effective parent involvement must include a range of opportunities from traditional activities of audience or school program support to shared decision-making.

The research indicates that educators must stop thinking of parents collectively. School personnel have to improve ways of discovering what individual parents are capable of and interested in. There is no doubt that we must keep in mind the special needs of constantly changing families and realize that not all parents lead the same kind of lives. Educators must initiate new and varied activities for parents which will result in meaningful involvement. Everett-Turner (1986) advises educators that,

> Before we can work as successful partners, we need to understand something important about parents, families and teachers. Each one is unique, with individual strengths and weaknesses. If we persist in holding a narrow view of parent involvement for all people, we're doomed to failure. (p.19)

From the teachers' perspective, involving parents increases the teachers' responsibilities thus a great deal of effort to involve parents appropriately must be put forth by principals and teachers. It is clear from the research that teacher training in parent involvement should be an essential component of both preservice and inservice teacher education. Many teachers, unfortunately, cannot handle this responsibility effectively. They have not been prepared to work with families and parent volunteers. It has been discovered by Chavkin and Williams, Jr., (1988) and Rich, (1985 and 1988) that very little undergraduate training in parent involvement for prospective teachers is occurring. They expressed the concern that teachers need to be better prepared to work with parents at all levels of involvement. In 1985 Rich recommended that,

> Teachers should receive training and materials to help them work more closely and effectively with today's family. Part of this new and enhanced role for teachers is to integrate what is learned outside the classroom with what is learned inside. It means working with adults as well as with children. (p. 25)

In Rich's (1988) most recent article, she indicates that, teachers have not been prepared to work with families. She believes that,

> Teacher training programs should orient teachers to the research on families as educators and equip them with strategies for reaching and teaching adults. Providing this know-how to new teachers should be expected from, and included in, current teacher training. (p. 91)

Rich mentioned a new program entitled, Schools and Parents United: Appractical Approach to Student Success, which was developed by the Home and School Institute, and is being produced as a multimedia kit by the National Education Association this year. The goal is to enable every school to conduct its own inservice program. Clearly some educators have realized the importance of training teachers in the area of parent involvement and are beginning to take some action in providing teachers with the appropriate skills to effectively involve parents. While, there is no doubt that teachers need to be better prepared to work with families and parents,

> it is also clear that teacher training about parent involvement is exceedingly complex. For parent involvement in training to be successful, it is imperative for teachers to be acknowledged as key people in the educational process and as the greatest potential link between the home and school. (Williams and Chavkin, 1986, p. 89)

While there are clear indicators pointing to the advantages of involving parents in school programs and the need to prepare teachers to do so effectively, no mention is made of the effect parent involvement has on the parents themselves. I believe that parent involvement is one of the keys to improving education, and it should be encouraged. We know it promotes better pupil performance, but what does it do for the parents? This issue has been neglected far too long and needs to be researched. It is my goal to gain insight into why parents initially volunteer and what motivates them to continue volunteering. It is important that the benefits accruing to parents from their involvement in their children's be discovered and described from the parent's point of view. This greater understanding will allow teachers to be sure that they are providing the parents with meaningful tasks. These

tasks should fit the identified needs of parents where they are rather than where the teacher or schools thinks the parent should be.

In order for a volunteer program to operate with maximum volunteer satisfaction educators need to know, from the parents' perspective how they feel about their volunteer experience. They must know what the parents' needs and motivations are. Educators must be aware of the changing and evolving needs of parents if they want them to continue volunteering.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Methodology and Setting

Since the purpose of this study was to discover from the parent volunteers' viewpoint how she feels about her[1] volunteer experience, it seemed reasonable to become a part of the parent volunteers' setting by observing and actively participating in their daily activities. Given the nature of the research question it was necessary to select a method that would allow the researcher to "interpret people's actions according to the way they understand their every day life" (Werner and Rothe, 1979, p. 113). The method had to permit the researcher to gain insights about parent volunteers and develop interpersonal relationships with them. It also had to be such that it would provide a way of checking with the informants to be sure observations and interpretations were correct.

The nature of this research can be referred to as "qualitative". Filstead (1979) outlines some of the possible methodologies suitable to qualitative research:

> Qualitative methodology refers to those research strategies, such as participant observation, in-depth interviewing, total participation in the activity being investigated, field work, etc., which allow the researcher to obtain first-hand knowledge about the empirical social world in question. Qualitative methodology allows the researcher to "get close to the data" thereby developing the analytical, conceptual, and categorical components of explanation from the data itself. (p. 36)

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[1] The five parent volunteers in the study were female, as are most parent volunteers. Hence, the female gender will be used throughout the study when referring to parent volunteers.

In the present study a number of qualitative research strategies or ethnographic methods were used to enable the researcher to "get close to the data". I utilized three methods of data collection to obtain the meaning of the informants' experience as volunteers. The methods that were used are 1) participant observation, 2) unstructured interviews, and 3) document collection (Wolcott, 1975). Descriptions of each method will follow after a brief description of the research process.

Research Process

Preliminary Phase

Several community schools were visited in the province to discuss parental involvement with principals, community school coordinators, and parents involved at school. This enabled me to develop a sense of how to approach parents and get some feedback as to how parents respond to certain types of questions pertinent to the research question. These initial visits to the schools provided useful information in determining the areas that could be pursued in the research project and gave me some experience in developing rapport with parents. As a result of these visits I became more aware of how I would approach parent volunteers.

Selection of Setting and Informants

As the intent of the study was to gain an in-depth understanding of parent volunteers' experience and how they feel about their parent volunteer experience, it was necessary to limit the number of settings and informants.

Two designated community schools in a city of 500,000 were chosen as the research sites. Selection of the two schools was based on the level of cooperation I experienced when visiting with the coordinator, parents, and principals. Once this decision was made and permission to do research in those school settings was granted, the coordinators were asked to give me a list of five or six parents who they considered were actively involved in the school for at least one year. Then the coordinator asked certain parents parents if they would be interested in considering being a participant in the research project. On my second visit to the schools both coordinators provided me with a list of parents who would agree if they were asked to participate in the study. During my second visit at Paradise Hill Community School I met two parents whose names were on the list and three at Lakeview Community School. I asked these five parents it they would be participants in the study that I was doing. In this introductory meeting I explained who I was, what I wanted and what I was going to do with the data I gathered. They all agreed to participate in the project on our first meeting. At this meeting each parent was guaranteed anonymity, the protection of her name, the school's name, and any other names she may have mentioned. The parents were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the project at anytime and each participant signed a consent form agreeing to participate in the project. (See Appendix A).

Establishing Rapport

From the first day that I met with the informants I began the process of gaining the informants' trust and confidence which was done mainly by the way I interacted with them. I reinforced my claim that I was sincerely interested in the parent volunteers. I communicated that professionals and parents alike had indicated that my study was valuable

and worthwhile. In all my encounters with the parents and other school personnel I endeavored to be sensitive to their feelings and situations and demonstrated that I was trustworthy. I realized that some form of reciprocity was essential in maintaining rapport and I indicated that together we were making a contribution to the advancement of knowledge.

Data Collection

In qualitative research, the researcher is the essential research instrument in collecting data. Therefore, I feel that it is necessary to indicate my background and experience. After completing my Bachelor of Education degree, with a specialization in Early Childhood Education I started teaching grade one in a community school where parent involvement was encouraged and maintained. During the four years I taught at this community school I learned how to effectively communicate and work with parents who volunteered in the classroom on a regularl basis, who attended special events, who made learning games and bulletin board displays at home, who worked full time, and those who did not participate in any school activities. It is evident that I did not approach this study as a stranger to the concept of parent involvement. Due to my prior knowledge of parent involvement, I consciously, from a teacher's perspective, approached my investigation of the parents' perspective as a stranger who really wanted to know how they felt. However, my expereince and knowledge allowed me to make the research situation unfamilar so that the data collected was not coming from a biased viewpoint.

The methods that I used to collect data will be described below.

Participant observation. My role was to gather dependable data and work towards understanding and describing accurately the parent volunteers' experience. As a participant

observer my role was spontaneously invented and to a certain extent developed by the combined efforts of my informants and myself. It was kept in mind that, "If the role gives the researcher the opportunity to observe what she wishes to observe, to communicate with and understand the people about whom she wishes to learn, in a manner and fashion to which they do not object, it is a good role (Wax, 1977, p. 55).

In order to describe accurately what parents do and to get an indepth understanding of how parents feel about their volunteer experience, I actively participated in tasks assigned to the parents. As Agar (1980) notes "the term (participant observation) suggests that you are directly involved in community life, observing and talking with people as you learn from them their view of reality" (p. 114). For example, I worked along side parents as they cut out letters, helped prepare snacks for the ECS class, photo copied, attended the parent council meetings that were scheduled in the evening or during the day, I helped make cakes one morning for the bake sale, attended the volunteer appreciation tea, and walked to the corner store with one parent to get lunch for her children. It seemed that the more varied the opportunities and activities I participated in, the greater the completeness and accuracy of the data collected. While working alongside each parent for a minimum of five one half days I recorded as much detail as possible in the form of field notes. Quotations that are taken from the field notes will be indicated with the letter 'F' in the parentheses at the end of the quotation. My field notes consisted of my observations, conversations, interpretations, suggestions for further information to be collected, and issues to be discussed in the interviews.

Interviews. Each parent volunteer was interviewed at least five times. These interviews followed each half day of observation and were conducted in a location familiar to the informants (either in their home or at the school). The interviews were between15

and 45 minutes long. I tape recorded and transcribed each interview. The interviews involved discussions based on the research questions, issues raised by the parents, themes and patterns that emerged from transcripts, field notes, and issues from previous interviews. The interviews were used to check with the informants to be sure observations and interpretations were correct.

Both principals and community school coordinators were interviewed. In most cases they were tape recorded and transcribed. Lengthy conversations were had with the community school secretaries at both schools. Pertinent comments made by the several teachers who I informally interviewed were recorded as we chatted about their perceptions of why parents volunteer and how parents feel about their experience. I was also able to chat with at least one child of each of my informants. The information gained added to the contextual description of the parents' involvement.

As it was important for me to conduct sensitive interviews I took several steps to establish rapport. I heeded some of the advice that Werner and Rothe (1979) alluded to on this matter.

My dress and vocabulary was representative of the situation. The parents dressed in casual clothing such as slacks, jeans, sweaters, and t-shirts, although they occasionally dressed up in skirts and blouses. I felt comfortable wearing casual skirts, dresses and slacks and I could sense that parents felt comfortable with both my dress and my style of interaction.

I realized that individuals talk more easily with those who share their interests, thereby making in-depth responses more likely. I expressed verbal interest in my informants and showed interest through eye contact and other non-verbal means. I was always enthusiastic about being with the parents. I listened intently to whatever they had to

say, I shared some of my own personal experiences during discussions, and was also eager to assist the volunteer with any project. I became involved with them in their daily routines whether it was having coffee with their friends, working with a small group of children, or making posters.

Because one of my major concerns was to let the parents speak of things that were important to them, ample time was provided for the interviewee to expand on matters relevant to her. Sensitivity to familiar social conventions was necessary to relax the interviewee and gain in-depth information. In order to relax the participants I allowed them to choose the place where they would like to be interviewed.

I asked open-ended questions in order to enhance our discussions and not restrict the respondents. Asking such questions allowed opportunity for conversational flexibility and maximized expression. In addition, open-ended questions allowed interviewer flexibility for greater probing with secondary questions which clarified answers and elicited further responses about peripheral points of interest. It was kept in mind that the informants were sharing with me feelings about their experience so the questions were used only as a guide.

The purpose of each interview was made clear so that we would be sure to stay on track. However, I was sensitive to the informants' emotions and excitement and on ocassion was able to sense when the questions I had in mind needed to be changed.

Document collection. Various printed materials were collected throughout the three months . These included: newsletters to parents, the school handbook, the parent volunteer handbook, various community school related articles kept by the community school secretary, agendas from parent council meetings, and notes from conventions concerning

community schools and parent involvement. Many of these documents were prepared with the parents help.

Data Anaylsis

Initial analysis of the data occurred simultaneously with data collection. Data was collected, analyzed, more questions were asked, themes and patterns that emerged were recorded, field notes and transcripts were read through to see how data supported the recurrent themes, and so on, until some sort of final picture began to emerge. The data collection continued until I began to get the same information over and over with nothing new being added. After I collected what I felt was enough data to understand the parents view of their volunteer experience, I left the school and engaged in some intensive analysis. A brief report was written about each parent which I shared with the parents. The informants had an opportunity to respond and verify whether or not the account accurately reflected their experiences and feelings. The reports summarized how each of the parents were recruited and why they initially got involved in their child's education. It included a list of all the activities the parent was involved in and a summary of the reasons why she continued to volunteer. Before the reports were written, the transcripts and field notes were given to a fellow graduate student to read and interpret. This second reader added credibility to the study both by validating my interpretations of the data and making me aware of some points that I might have missed (Glazer, 1972).

The reports given to the parents were summaries of the data organized under the following headings: 1) parents are recruited and get involved, 2) parents participate in various tasks, and 3) parents continue to volunteer. As the data was collected, recurrent statements emerged and fell into one of these categories. While the reasons why parents

got involved and continued to volunteer were not equally important to all parents, these explanations were still relevant to each of the five parents in the study.

Credibility

It was important for me to be sure that I had an accurate account of how the parents felt about their experience as a parent volunteer. The following was done to ensure credibility:

1) During interviews and casual conversations with the volunteers, confirmation was made of observations and interpretations.

2) I participated in a variety of activities.

3) A second reader of the fieldnotes and transcripts added validity by reading the data that was collected and checking the interpretations that were made.

4) I was aware of biases and personal priorities that could affect what was seen or heard and how information was interpreted. The habit of introspection was developed during the data collection process (Bogdan, 1972).

Research Setting

Description of the Schools

The research was focused in Paradise Hill Community School and Lakeview Community School which held many common characteristics. The importance of "everyone's a learner, everyone's a teacher", a key phrase identified by the IDCSC, is stressed by both these community schools as parents work with teachers, students, secretaries, and as students work with students. Parents were always encouraged to

participate in the actions of the school and, as such, gained a greater sense of ownership as to education and school related activities.

The students, staff, and parents of both schools strive to become more aware of the school's community and the greater community of Alberta through various programs such as "Adopt a Senior Citizen" and classroom exchanges with other community schools in the province. Parents were always chatting about various workshops such as "How to Handle Christmas Stress and Excitement," "How to Help Your Child Succeed in Reading and Writing," and "Disciplinary Practices" that were being offered through the school and a city-wide parent organization entitled, "Parents Involved As Partners In Education".

Making learning meaningful is the goal of a community school. Studies are planned and taught so that the students draw from their experiences and learn by doing. Community studies, service projects, field trips, walkabouts, interviews, guest speakers, and hands on activities are regular parts of the learning process. Community related curriculum is the first characteristic of a community school and falls within the framework of the Provincial curriculum. Parents take part in curriculum meetings and help in the development and planning of the activities. They find and arrange for resources which the classes may use. Everything from bringing in an Easter Bunny or a Scientist to providing various materials for student projects. Both community schools take a life-centered approach to learning and have an open door policy welcoming parents and encouraging them to gain an understanding of their sons' and daughters' educational programs. There is a commitment to a partnership among parents and teachers in meeting the needs of the students at home and at school. The schools promote educational teamwork and meaningful involvement of parents and community members, and serve as learning centers for people of all ages in the neighborhood. Community groups and agencies offer classes

and programs for age groups from preschoolers to adults. As in all community schools, Lakeview and Paradise Hill are open on an extended basis for the community's use. Residents also gain leadership skills and practical knowledge through their participation in meetings, community action, and other informal learning activities that occur in their community school. Both schools operate with the philosophy that education is a Life-long learning process. The schools take an active role in the community and work with residents, community leaders, groups, and public agencies to meet school and community needs.

The Volunteer Handbook for each school is very similar. The beginning statement in both books is: "Parents, community, and school working together to provide a richer education for our children." They both list three major goals of their volunteer program:

1. Enlist and strengthen the cooperation of parents in the education of their children.

2. Provide volunteer help to the classroom teacher and the school to better meet the needs of the individual students and the school population in general.

3. Foster an environment that encourages effective two way communication between home and school.

Both schools consider volunteers to be important members of the staff and therefore, their policies extend to their parents volunteers. The following guidelines were identified in both of the Volunteer Handbooks:

1. Confidentiality. Be professionally discreet. Never discuss information about children, parents, or professionals that you are privy to through your volunteer activity at the school.

2. We ask that problems and complaints be dealt with in the school, not in the community. Discuss your problem with the coordinator, the principal, or the assistant principal.

3. Take note of and become familiar with general school rules and procedures so that you may provide a positive role model to students. This will also assist you to more comfortably deal with the students.

In the next section I will provide a description of the two schools to give a feeling for the uniqueness of each of the individual schools. Following the description of each school a portrait of the volunteers /informants from each of the schools will be provided.

Paradise Hill Community School. Upon entering Paradise Hill Community School one is struck by the bulletin board displaying the words "Learning for Life." Opposite this bulletin board was a handmade banner with a brightly coloured rainbow displaying the words "Welcome to Paradise Hill Community School". On the opposite wall was a poster that read: "Parents are a child's first teacher of values, attitudes, and language. Parents are a child's most important teacher and strongest influence in a child's life." In the front entrance was a display entitled, Familiarity with Community School Characteristics. There were photographs displaying a puppet unit that the Grade Two students did. The photographs indicated or represented the various characteristics such as Community related curriculum, interagency cooperation, involvement of parents, parent appreciation, and student involvement. These signs were the first indication to visitors that this school views education as a lifelong process. In the hallway at the back door, near the community wing of the school, there were banners hanging from the ceiling that said such things as:

This is your Community School,

Paradise Hill Community School is .... Caring For Others,

Take time to live, love, laugh and smile with support...Paradise Hill

community Single Parents Group.

A notice displayed on a bulletin board in the library reinforces the school's commitment to involvement:

Community Related Curriculum in Our School---

Tell me. . .I will forget

Show me. . .I may remember

Involve me. . .I will understand

The main themes in the philosophy of Paradise Hill Community School are:

1. Life Centered Learning: Making learning meaningful is the goal of a community school. Teachers modify the provincial curriculum so that it meets the needs of students and relates to their daily lives. Field trips, speakers, community walk-abouts and studies, interviews and hands-on activities are used to enhance student learning.

2. Involvement of Parents: An open door policy exists and all parents are welcome to visit, discuss topics of concern, or participate in any of our classroom/school programs. A democratic atmosphere exists to encourage community involvement and partnership among parents and teachers to meet needs of the children at home and at school.

3. Cooperation: The school takes an active role in the community and works with groups and agencies to meet school and community needs.

4. Life Long Learning: The school is a learning and participation center for all age groups in the community twelve months a year. It has no learning boundaries.

The community is made up of some single-family homes, large condo complexes and apartment buildings and low income subsidized housing. There are 280 students from

this community representing a mixture of racial and ethnic background. A large percentage of these students come from single-parent homes. Vandalism is common in the community with a high crime and unemployment rate.

The school was build in 1977 as an "open area" school, but partial walls have since been erected to section off14 classrooms. There are 16 teachers on staff, one principal, a secretary , one full-time and one part-time custodian, a community school coordinator, and a half-time volunteer coordinator. Also on staff is a .35 time curriculum coordinator and a half-time community school secretary. The last four positions are a result of the community school designation and extra funding for these positons is being provided by the IDCSC grant. Paradise Hill School received community school designation on March 1, 1981 being the fifth school in Alberta to become designated.

The community wing of the school houses rooms for the following programs operated by the Community League: Pre-school Fun Time, Drop In Babysitting, Adult Basic Education, Boys and Girls Club, and Play School.The library is in the centre of the school. Paradise Hill Community School provides several programs to meet individual student needs: Academic Challenge, Physically Handicapped, Junior High Adaptation, Counselling, Extended French, Resource Room, and Clubs and Intramurals.

In the large staffroom one would immediately notice the volunteer pins on the bulletin board, the volunteer work schedule and the V.I.P. coffee mugs hanging on the cup rack with the volunteers names printed on them which indicates the importance of volunteers to this school.

Lakeview Community School. The wall in the front entrance of Lakeview Community School bears the large gold letters "Lakeview School Welcomes You". A show case in which displays of the themes and activities for each grade's "Highlight"

program can been seen upon entering the school. Grade level highlights are units which are developed around curricular themes. Each of these units integrates, as much as possible, all curricular areas, involves parents, community resource people, and includes some major event. For example, the grade one highlight was city/farm comparison, the children in grade three studied Christmas around the world, and the grade four class did a unit on flight.

There was a bulletin board in the hallway for "Community School News." One of the announcements on the board was a list of the various options available for "Option Month." The option program is offered during the month of May, and allows the children to sign up for a course of their choice for one afternoon a week. Courses such as, chocolate making, karate, racquet ball, calligraphy, sewing, Mexican Cooking, and a course on computers was offered. The courses were taught by teachers, parents, and people in the community. Beside the "Community School News" was a display of various photographs of special school events such as the parent appreciation tea, drama persentations, and various field trips.

The Lakeview Community School logo is P.R.I.D.E. standing for, personal growth and development, respect and responsibility, individualized expectation, development of skills for the future, and excitement for learning. The principal, teachers, and parents describe their school as one that serves the needs of the community by creating an atmosphere which encourages people to work and learn together. This leads to parent involvement, staff/community interaction, interagency co-operation, the development of community oriented curriculum, an understanding of community needs, provision for life long learning, and advantageous use of community facilities. They believe that their students are not just living for today, but are preparing for tomorrow.

Lakeview School was built in 1980 and in 1982 became the thirty-first designated community school in Alberta. The building has a core with two pods attached (each containing four classrooms) and four separate portable classrooms. The population of the school population is considered representative of most Alberta populations. There is a mix of ethnic groups and socio-economic groups. The school attempts to work within this diverse environment and provide for the needs of the community members. The housing in this neighborhood includes a few walk-up apartments and townhouses, as well as small and large single-family homes. There are community 600 students from the community who are assigned to 20 classrooms staffed by 28 teachers. There is a principal, vice-principal, a full-time community school coordinator, a half time curriculum coordinator, and a half-time community school secretary in addition to a full time school secretary, a full-time and half-time custodian, and part-time evening hostess on staff at this school.

The staffroom was always a very busy and inviting place for various groups, including parents, to meet. There were always parents coming in and out of the staffroom, working on individual projects, consulting with teachers, or just visiting and having coffee. The community school coordinator, principal, and secretary would often join the parents and have coffee with them. It was normal to see groups of parents and other community members such as, the parks and recreation workers who have their office in the school, have meetings in the staffroom.

Lakeview Community School offers the following special programs: English as a Second Language, Gifted Program and Academic Challenge, Extended French, Counselling, Resource Room, Houseleagues, and Running Club.

Description of Informants

A brief description of the parents who participated in my study will be given below.

Sharla. Sharla started volunteering "when my first son was in play school. It was a program that needed parent volunteers in order for it to operate...I have loved it ever since and developed the need to want to help" (Sharla, April 16, p. 3). Now, four years later with two children attending Paradise Hill Community School and a preschooler at home, Sharla is a committed volunteer. Even though she works full time, she still finds time on her day off to come to school and arrives at the school every Friday morning with her three year-old son, Shaun. He always asks "...mommy when is it going to be Friday? Can we go to the school?" (April 16, p. 2) Sharla takes Shaun to the Drop-In-Babysitting room which is in the school. "He really enjoys going! The babysitting service is just great! My son gets a lot out of it, just playing and meeting new children. Because I am a volunteer it is free " (April 16, p. 2).

Once she had Shaun settled she got a cup of coffee and went directly into the custodian's room where the "block parent desk " is located. At 9:00 Sharla she would begin phoning the homes of the children who were absent that morning. While Sharla did her phoning, Nancy, Amber, Brenda, occasionally the custodian, and Matthew, who is the community school coordinator, hadcoffee together at the table across from the block parent desk. Others often joined them for coffee. For instance the scout leader and the volunteer coordinator were there during one of the coffee parties. If anyone needs one of the parents on Friday mornings, they know where to find them and anyone is welcomed to join them.

After Sharla finished the absentee check, which around 10:00, she usually went into the kindergarten room to work with the children in small groups or individually. Sharla also went into other classrooms if her help was needed.

Nancy. Nancy is a fun loving person who enjoys being around people. Nancy's husband works out of the city and is only home once or twice a week. Nancy is in her late thirties and a mother of four. She is a practical joker and when talking about the coffee cups that the volunteers have with letters V.I.P. Nancy said, "What can be our motto? Virgin in Paradise, all these volunteers don't know what the heck they are getting themselves into" (April 23, p. 10).

She commented, " I have had weird ideas all my life. I will try anything once!" and continued to tell me some of the adventurous events that occurred in her life as a child and an adult. She is a "people person" and indicated how she likes listening to people. In school she liked sociology and psychology. "I thought it was so neat because I thought I could solve the world's problems" (Nancy, April 14, p. 3).

Nancy has been a parent volunteer for the last 5 years. Her first task was to coordinate the snacks for her son's ECS class. She has since done a number of different activities in and around the school such as unit planning with her child's teacher, organizing the "Breakfast with Santa", and setting up the babysitting service offered at the school.

Presently she is tutoring a student from a grade four classroom. She is a room parent representative and is very involved in fund raising events, particularly the monthly bingos. She is in the process of organizing the school garage sale. Nancy is the treasurer of the parent advisory council and serves on a number of ad hoc committees, such as the steering committee and community school evaluation. Nancy does clerical work for the

teachers and the secretary which includes typing, photo copying, and filing. Nancy is usually in the school everyday, sometimes just for an hour and sometimes for a half the day.

Jill. Jill is a very soft spoken individual. She is in her early thirties and has a son in grade four and daughter in grade one. She worked as a registered nurse before she was married and occasionally after her children were born. She does not work anymore because, "my husband spends a lot of time out of town and we agreed that I wouldn't work. Our children should always have access to one of us at all times" (Jill, June 5, p. 6). When Jill worked as a nurse she was on the pediatrics floor in the neo-natal intensive care unit and mentioned "you are really needed there" (April 21, p. 5). Coming into the school on a regular basis to help teachers and childen gives her that same sort of feeling of being needed.

Jill started volunteering when her son was in kindergarten. Then when her son started grade one the coordinator "started her into other things." At that time, Jill came in twice a week and now comes into the school every afternoon, except Tuesday. "I found that having Tuesdays all to myself is a way I can keep my life together and my life in order. You have to have limits unless you want to get to that burn out stage" (Jill, June 5, p. 6).

She was involved with tutoring and clerical duties on a regular basis. She assisted teachers on field trips, helped plan and organize special events and has served on the parent advisory and the grade one highlight committee. She also assisted in classrooms during special activities.

This year she was working with a group of "slow learners" an hour everyday and was paid for her services because of a special education fund the school received.

Gwen. Gwen is a very young looking, petite woman in her late thirties who used to work as a receptionist. Gwen and her husband adopted two daughters a year and a half ago. Both daughters attend Lakeview Community School. Gwen's husband owns his own business and will occasionally volunteer his time for special events. Gwen started volunteering in September 1986 in response to a recruitment letter that was sent home by the community school coordinator. When Gwen talked about her experience of volunteering for the first time, she described it as being scary and related it to her experience of going back to work, which she did three years ago, but quit last year.

> I was a housewife for twelve years and finally decided to get a job. That first push out the door was awful. It wasn't easy but once I got out everything was fine. Then I quit work and now volunteering is like getting back into the working world. Getting out and volunteering might have been a bit scary at first but it has been really good for me ...if I just always stayed at home I would get very shy again" (April 21, p. 5).

Gwen spend every Thursday afternoon in the library filing and carding books. She worked with a group of English as a Second Language students every afternoon for one hour. She would occasionally go on field trips and attended PTA meetings on a regular basis.

Gwen is a fantastic seamstress and during one of our lunch hour interviews both daughters showed me all the beautiful clothes Gwen had sewn for them. She shared this talent during the option month at Lakeview School by teaching a group of sixth grade students to sew a sweat shirt and shorts. It was exciting for me to assist Gwen in two of these sewing sessions.

Louise. Louise is in her mid-thirties. She is a mother of two children, one in kindergarten and one in Junior High School. Her husband does the majority of his work outside the city and is at home only on the weekends. Louise had a career as an accountant

for a couple years but quit because of the stress and all the overtime work. She became a volunteer seven years ago when her eldest daughter was in grade two at which time Lakeview Community School just opened.

Louise was part of the first "parent group" of the new school. This parent group worked very hard to promote he concept of community schools and was very influential in getting Lakeview designated as a community school (April 14, F).

Louise is the kind of person who likes to keep busy. She mentioned, "I always have to be doing something and just can't say no when asked to do a job" (May 5, p. 4). Being the kind of person who likes to keep busy, Louise responded immediately to a letter sent home to parents by the communinty school coordinator inviting them to come and help at school.

During the two months that I worked along side Louise, I found that she was always doing something and that no two days were the same. She would photo copy, cut bulletin letters out, draw posters, make cakes for the spring tea, go on field trips with the kindergarten students, prepare snacks for the kindergarten children, and occasionally worked in various classrooms when her assistance was required. The majority of her volunteer work was done in the workroom assisting the paid program aide.

During one of the mornings I spent with Louise while she was making cakes for the Spring Tea we had the following discussion:

R: Are you always willing to do whatever you are requested to do?

I: Oh yeh, I will do just about anything

R: Are you ever frustrated with some of the tasks you are asked to do for example, making all these cakes?

I: No, I was hoping not to do as much of it today. Yesterday was quite the day I had chocolate all over.

Aide: We work her too hard sometimes and we say oh no what happens if she decides she is not going to come back?

R: Would she tell you if she was overworked?

Aide: Probably not.

(both Louise and aide laugh)

I: Well, if I'm going to be here I better be always doing some thing or I might as well stay home.

Later that day I had a chat with Louise's five year old daughter Darlene,

Darlene: So, what are you doing today?

R: Your mom and I are making rice krispie squares.

Darlene: (with a laugh) Is my mom going to get messy clothes again?! Did you see her yesterday? She had chocolate all over herself!

Louise is no doubt a very dedicated volunteer worker. She comes to shool every morning, sometimes in the afternoon, and occasionally in the evenings to work on certain projects with the evening hostess.

Sharla, Nancy, Jill, Gwen, and Louise with their unique personalities were fun people to be with. They were all dedicated parent volunteers with a number of years experience. Four out of the five parents have had four or more years of experience being volunteers and plan to continue their commitment of being involved in their children's school.

It was through spending extensive time with these five people that enabled me to understand some very important aspects of parent volunteering from the parents'

perspective. The parent volunteers' feelings about their experience will be reported in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

Upon analyzing the data collected from the five parent volunteers there seemed to be three important aspects to the parents involvement. The first section will describe how the parents were recruited and why they initially got involved in their child's education, the second part will identify the tasks that parents did, and third discusses the reasons why these parents continue to be involved. While the focus of the study was on the parents' perspective, I did dialogue with other school personnel. The last section documents the teachers', principals', and community school coordinators' perceptions of parent volunteers.

Recruitment and Initial Involvement of Parents

There are several strategies and techniques which school personnel use to get parents into the school and involved in their children's education. The literature indicates that many educators consider it useful to have parent volunteers come into the classroom and school. From the four teachers I interviewed, brief discussions with other teachers while doing my research, and from the literature, it seems that educators want parents to participate in their child's schooling because it allows the teachers to provide more individualization and enrichment of instruction. Such support in most cases results in increased academic achievement in the students. Teachers believe that there will be more effective utilization of their time and skills and that because of the unique resources contributed by parents, children's school experiences will be enriched. Having parents involved will also increase children's motivation in learning and strengthen school-community relations through positive participation.

It was discovered that while teachers had specific reasons for having volunteers in their classrooms, the parents themselves also had specific reasons for volunteering. The initial reasons for parents wanting to volunteer emerged while observing, working alongside, and interviewing the five parent volunteers. Sharla began volunteering four years ago when her first son was in play school. "It was a program that needed parent volunteers in order for it to operate . . . Then in kindergarten parents were required to volunteer" (Sharla, April 16, p. 3). Nancy and Jill started volunteering in the school when their children were in kindergarten. They were told by the kindergarten teachers that one of the basic ingredients of any kindergarten program was parent involvement. The teachers encouraged it and provided many opportunities for parents to be actively involved in the program. The parents agreed with the teachers' philosophy that parents are already involved as primary educators of their children before kindergarten and it makes sense to continue to utilize this involvement in the early years of formal education.

Nancy, Jill, and Sharla mentioned that when their children completed their year in kindergarten and entered grade one the parents received a letter from the community school coordinator requesting parents to volunteer, for example, as classroom helpers, to help children individually, to assist in the library, or do clerical tasks for teachers. Gwen and Louise started their volunteer work in response to the same kind of letter, but did not have any prior experience volunteering in a school or kindergarten program.

I have categorized the specific reasons under five headings, which are quotes from the parents. 1) "I want to help my child, the teachers, and the school." 2) It is important for me to establish a rapport with the teachers." 3) "I want to know what is going on in my child's school." 4) "It is important to show my children that I'm interested in their education." 5) "I have the need to interact with other adults."

"I want to help my child, the teachers, and the school."

The desire to help their children, lighten the load of the teacher, and the need to feel useful were reasons noted by all the parents for getting involved in their children's schooling.

Louise mentioned, "It's just part of my nature to help. I don't think I have been able to say no to anybody (April 21, F). In an earlier interview, she said, "Oh, I think it is a basic human need. I think everyone needs to help a little" (April 14, p. 3). Jill expressed why she initially started volunteering, "I think it is a need for me to help others. I don't work as a nurse anymore. But I really enjoyed nursing . . . and I was really needed there and still have that need to help people" (April 21, p. 5). Nancy stressed that she wanted to contribute and started volunteering because "I want to be doing something constructive and useful" (April 23, p. 11).

Several parents expressed the concern that teachers work hard and they need the help and that is one reason why they volunteered. In Nancy words,

> Teachers have a lot of work to do they have a lot of planning to do .people see the teacher in the classroom from 9:00- 3:00. Teaching really is not a easy job. Many people don't realize all the correcting teachers do and the time that goes into planning units. Teachers have a heavy load. (May 14, p. 3)

Sharla feels that "there will always be children who need extra help and the teacher just won't have time to work with them" (April 24, p. 7). Gwen wanted to help at school and felt that teachers were overworked. "They have to spend time with behavior problem children, . . . teachers really need the help" (May 12, p. 8). Gwen also expressed the amount of work the librarian has to do and felt "she needs clerical assistance in order to free her to pursue those aspects of her work that require professional skill, judgement, and decision (Gwen, May 12, p. 5).

As a result of helping, parents expressed that they appreciate the dedication and the difficulty of a teacher's job much more. They can see that they have lightened the load of the teachers or support staff by contributing and thus enabling teachers to devote more of

their time and energy to planning, preparation, and efficient performance of the teaching function. When discussing the absentee check program, Sharla indicated that she was thankful that she was helping because,

> With time being so limited for actual teaching time, the teachers don't need to waste 20 minutes doing an absentee check. We look after it. Then I know my own kid's teacher is spending her time with teaching and not administrative kinds of things that waste valuable teaching time. (April 24, p. 2)

"It is important for me to establish a rapport with the teachers."

The motivation for Jill to volunteer was rooted in her strong feelings toward the value of education. Because she highly values education "it is worth putting an effort into it" (June 5, p. 2).

When Gwen reflected back to her first weeks of volunteering she realized that one of the major reasons she was volunteering was, "I want to establish a rapport with the teachers because they will know that they can talk to me if a problem comes up rather than them thinking, 'Gee I wonder if that parent really cares!' " (May 5, p. 4). She continued to explain how this would benefit her children. "I want to help the teacher understand problem situations my daughter may be going through. It will really help my children and everyone in the long run " (May 12, p. 9).

The general feeling that parent involvement allowed all the parents to develop a rapport with the teacher was articulated by all five parents. As a result of developing this rapport, parents felt that there was a sense of continuity between home and school. They maintained that because they were closely involved a consistency of values between the home and school occurred. All the parents concured that any problems their children might have at school would be resolved earlier than if they were never involved in the school.

"I want to know what is going on in my child's school."

Parents have a personal interest in what their children are learning and doing. They want their children to know how interested they are. Some of them want the teacher to know, too.

Just as some parents felt it was a natural feeling to help, it was also a natural feeling to know what was going on in their children's school. Louise said, "I volunteer because I want to be involved in my child's school. It is nice to know what is going on" (April 14, p. 9). She continued on, " You will see when we go into Jesse's room how excited those kids will be when we bring in the Easter Bunny. Because I knew what was going on in her classroom, I will be able to relate with Jesse when she shares with me what happened at school" (April 14, p. 11).

Sharla voiced a concern. "I want to keep on top of all that goes on.. I'm not coming here to make sure my kids are behaving perfectly . . . I'm one step ahead because I know sooner what is going on" (May 15, p. 2). Nancy mentioned the same reason (May 1, F). Gwen volunteered at the school because, "Maybe I'm just nosey--curious to find out what is going on at school" (April 27, p. 4).

Jill expressed her desire to know what was going on in her children's school in the following comment.

> By helping in the school, I get to know the kids my son plays with. They know me and I know them. It is really important. When my child talks about who he played with. I know that person, it is just not a name. When they ask if they can go play at so and so's house I know where he is going. (April 21, p. 8)

"It is important to show my children that I am interested in their schooling."

Closely related to the need to know what was going on at school was the importance three of the parents placed on showing their children that they were interested in their education.

Sharla spoke at great length on how her mom had always supported her, not so much in school, but in after school activities. She stated, "I wouldn't think any different, I just assumed I would always support my kids" (May 8, p. 4). "The boys know we care about their schooling and they know we are here . . ." (April 16, p. 1). Jill expressed her view this way,

> My kids like me being at school. Then school is not a chore, it is a nice place to be. You know mom doesn't have to go, she goes because she wants to go. They get a nice positive feeling about school. It's not like you send them. We value education and think it is worth putting an effort into it. (June 5, p. 2)

It was interesting to discover that most of the parents believed that they were the role models for their children and that they let their children know that education was important by taking the time to be involved.

"I have the need to interact with other adults."

One of the reasons why Louise stared volunteering was because,

> I was just sitting at home. I had just moved to this community and did not know anyone. Coming to school was a great way of meeting people! I met tons of people. I wouldn't know half the people in this community if it wasn't for this school because, you get out and meet new people. I made a lot of friends. It beats sitting at home. Volunteering is a way of getting back out around adults. Back into the swing of things. (April 21, p. 2)

This came up a week later when Louise claimed, "If I had to sit with 24 hours watching T.V. or cleaning the house I would go bonkers! Volunteering is an outlet to be around other adults. I can't stand to me by myself all the time. I like the contact with other people" (April 28, p. 5).

Just as there was a need to help, there was a need to interact with adults. Jill communicated to me that interacting with others was a basic human need, "It is a very positive experience for me. It is rewarding and I feel good about myself. It's a good way to know the people in my community. Everyone needs companionship. It is really easy to fall into a trap --for people to isolate themselves" (May 12, p. 7).

Nancy spoke of this need to interact with others. "I need to see other human beings and be around adults rather than kids all the time. My husband is away except one day of the week. So, I deal constantly with kids and I come to the school and volunteer and I am able to talk to adults" (April 16, p. 5)

Volunteering was a way of satisfying various needs. The relative importance of these needs seems to vary from one person to another.

Tasks Assigned to the Parents

Often when parents and teachers think of parent involvement they immediately visualize parents counting hot dog money, photo copying worksheets, and baking for the upcoming bake sale. Yes, these jobs must be done and for some parents that is what they enjoy doing, but, many parents take on additional roles and are actively involved in the daily life of the school. They work with small groups of children, share their special expertise in enrichment programs, and may be given the opportunity to share in policy decisions.

When parents are involved in their children's schooling the evidence is clear that their children are likely to achieve more. The parents in my study felt that because they were involved, their children "have a better attitude and they have a much more positive outlook on life" (Sharla, April 24, p. 8). Nancy noted that, "Being involved enables me to communicate directly with the teacher when Joshua is misbehaving and he is soon back on track doing his schoolwork. By me being involved it really does result in better achievement for my son" (May 5, p. 2).

The five parents that I worked with expressed that what they did as parent volunteers was an important element in how they felt about their experience. In my analysis, the specific tasks that parents were involved in fell into the categories of general non-instructional, clerical, field trips, classroom assistant, tutoring, and planning and

organizing fund-raising and community school events. Examples of the range of tasks within each category will be briefly described below.

General Non-Instructional

All five parents were room representatives in one of their children's classroom. Their duty as room representatives was to represent the classroom at the parent advisory council meetings and share what special events or any concerns that may be occurring in that particular classroom. They would take part in any decision-making at these meetings, such as budgeting and disciplinary procedures. The room representatives also reported to all parents in the classroom any major decisions made at the parent advisory meetings and contacted every parent three or four times in the school year requesting baking for the bake sale or asking them to work at the bingo. As mentioned by Carole, one of the community school coordinators, "It is a form of communication, but more of a begging and pleading routine. Next year it will be different. For example, the reps will phone new families and welcome them into the community" (June 5, p. 6).

The absentee check program also comes under this category. Sharla spent every Friday morning calling the homes of the children who were not in attendance.

Clerical

I observed all the parents doing some clerical work. Gwen worked in the library every Thursday afternoon carding and shelving books. Louise spent the majority of her time every morning assisting the program aide in preparing posters and other instructional materials, cutting letters, laminating materials, colouring pictures, and photocopying. She would also assist in compiling the weekly school newsletters. Nancy spent Thursday morning photocopying for the teachers. She would occasionally do some filing.

Field Trips

All the parents assisted the teachers on field trips. They were usually in charge of supervising a small group while on the field trip. In a few cases the parents had helped plan the field trip.

Classroom Assistant

Louise, Sharla, and Jill assisted in the classroom during instructional time. Sharla regularly worked with small groups or individuals who needed help in the kindergarten classroom. Jill occasionally helped the teacher in her child's grade one classroom with special art activities. Louise assisted in classrooms with special activities such as art and cooking projects, and when special speakers were invited into the classroom. Quite often she would prepare the snack for the kindergarten children and would occasionally assist in the classroom by working with small groups or individual students. She would read and play matching and counting games with the children.

Tutoring

Nancy, Gwen, and Jill worked on a regular basis with small groups or individual children who left their classrooms to spend some time with the parent volunteers. Gwen worked every afternoon with a group of English as a Second Language students, Jill spent the majority of her volunteer time tutoring a student with learning disabilities, and in April Nancy started tutoring a girl who had difficulties in Math.

Planning and Organizing Fund Raising and Community School Events

The majority of Nancy's volunteer time was spent in decision making, planning and organizing school events, and socializing. While I was at the school Nancy organized the garage sale. She spoke about the "Breakfast with Santa" that the school had.

> I wanted the school to have a "Breakfast with Santa", so on one of our Friday morning coffee clatches with Darlene, Cindy, and Anne, I said, "You guys how do you feel about having a "Breakfast with Santa " here at school?" They replied, "It sounds terrific!" Miles, the caretaker, and a few others and I planned it through and it was a success. I also started planning a winter carnival but unfortunately we didn't have enough snow. (Nancy, April 14, p. 1)

Jill spent many hours organizing a potluck supper for the grade one class that included the students, parents, and a grade one class who were on a student-exchange from a rural northern community school. Louise spent a great deal of time helping prepare for various school events such as the Spring tea, pancake breakfasts, and various sport events.

The three parents from Lakeview Community School spent four Tuesday afternoons in May teaching an option. Gwen instructed a sewing class and Jill with Louise's assistance instructed a chocolate making class.

The tasks parents enjoyed and wanted to do changed from time to time. At one time they may have enjoyed doing various clerical tasks, but then decided they preferred to be directly involved with the children or in fund-raising activities. It became clear that different parents gained satisfaction from involvement in different tasks. Furthermore, as parents' skills, interests, and level of comfort changed they moved into new ways of being involved. I found that parents need the freedom to be flexible to switch to different tasks that they consider more suitable to their needs at that time. For example, Jill worked with the teacher aide in the workroom photocopying, cutting letters, preparing posters, and other instructional materials.

> Working in the workroom was not meeting my needs and the coordinator was very cooperative and the staff are too because if you have started something and it isn't for you there is no pressure put on you to stay doing that task. I missed working with the kids. So, I went back to working directly with them. I really like working with kids a lot better (May 12, p. 2-3).

Jill is now very comfortable with the tutoring she does with children. All parents feel that what they do must suit their abilities, personalities, and needs. It is not until they have

done the task for a couple of weeks or even a couple of months that they realize whether or not it is appropriate for them.

When talking to Nancy about her task of tutoring one child she indicated, "I wonder sometimes, 'Do I really want to be doing this? Will I really make a difference?' Well, it is not as scary as I thought it would be" (May 14, p. 11).

Gwen made sure not to do things that were frustrating for her. "If I get frustrated and for too long of a time I give up on it. I don't need that frustration. I could be frustrated at home. I don't need the aggravation" (April 27, p. 1).

Volunteer Experience is Worthwhile

Initial motivation for volunteering differs from the reason for continuing to volunteer. "Whatever the initial motivation for volunteering may have been, if the volunteer is to remain committed to the school there must be some perceived level of satisfaction" (Moore,1985 p.103). I have grouped and labelled the benefits that the five parents in my study experienced, which will be discussed in this section as follows: achievement, social interaction, gaining new or more knowledge, enhanced self-esteem, recognition, and a sense of belonging.

"Volunteers work for free, but not for nothing " (Mulligan, 1979, p. 26). According to Mulligan this axiom means that the volunteers must feel that what they are doing is worthwhile. It must be worthwhile and satisfying if parents are going to continue to give their time volunteering. What motivates parents to volunteer may differ among parents. All parents in this study had the following motivations but some motivators were stronger for some than others.

Achievement

Moore (1985) discussed how the need to achieve motivates volunteers to continue to volunteer. He mentioned that people continued to volunteer because of the satisfaction they received from making things happen, completing projects, being able to feeling proud of a good job that they did, to see the progress that is occurring in programs and the positive changes happening in their own life as a result of their volunteer experience. All the parents in my study were motivated to continue to volunteer because of at least one of these reasons.

Nancy continues to volunteer because she is able to "make things happen". Organizing the garage sale and "Breakfast with Santa" are two examples of completing something and feeling proud because the events were a success.

Gwen is proud of the job she does with her English as a Second Language students. It is a worthwhile job to be able to witness the progress made by the children she assists. This feeling motivates her to continue to volunteer. Gwen expressed, "It is a rewarding job because I'm able to see progress . . . I see the results. Claudette did not know any English and now we can't keep her quiet" (April 27, p. 2-3).

Louise continues to volunteer and enjoys the aspect of completing tasks,

> I come in, do a project, and it is finished. You put it on the teacher's shelf and that's the end of it. You go onto something else and complete it instead of doing something that goes on and on . . . and you are never really finished. I like the idea that you start a project and you see results. You see it through to the end and you start something else.
>
> R: So, that satisfaction of completing a project is very important to you?
>
> I: Yes, Having been an accountant I worked at that and it never ends. It is always the same ledger and the same files. You work all month and do month end reports and then you turn around and do the same thing the following month. Here I'm laminating and xeroxing but, when I finish there is always something different that is what I enjoy. The job I had as an accountant was very high pressure and I don't want to go back to that kind of job. Not while my kids are young. (April 14, p. 4)

For Jill, one of the most important aspects of her volunteer experience is the feeling that "I've accomplished something and when I'm not working outside the home I need something that will give me that sense of accomplishment. To me it is like a job" (May 12, p. 1). Jill also expressed her satisfaction in seeing children improve as a result of the work she did with them. "Jesse wrote a one and a half page story independently in the classroom. That is real progress for her-that's just great. I couldn't believe it. I was so pleased! It is so satisfying to see the improvement in Jesse skills" (June 5, p. 4). Jill treats her volunteer tasks as if it were her job. "I don't get paid for this but I still do the best job I can. Just because I'm a volunteer doesn't mean I can do a sloppy job" (June 5, p. 7).

To see the change in the children that Sharla works with motivates her to continue to volunteer.

> I like to see what the children are like when I first start helping them and see how they have progressed. Maybe they haven't come as far as expected by the teacher, but they improved a bit because I have taken the time as a volunteer to go into that class. There is always going to be that element that the teacher will not get to every child because of the large number of students and so for me to help a child get a little bit further ahead is a worthwhile experience not only for the child but for me too. There will always be children who need extra help and the teacher just won't have time. For me personally it is just that I see progress happening with them. I see if they are improving and catching on to the skills that they are behind in. (May 14, p.11)

Social Interaction

Meeting new people and making new friends was a very important aspect that made it worthwhile for all the parents in my study to stay involved. Louise stated that, "Volunteering is a great way of meeting people! I met tons of people that I wouldn't have met if it wasn't for volunteering at this school. I have made a lot of friends" (April 21, p. 4). Nancy felt it was a need of hers to be around others and continues to volunteer because she is "meeting all kinds of people and it is great being with other adults" (April 23, p. 5). Sharla and Nancy not only found socializing with others at school a motivator

to continue, but the contact with children was important. "It is just wonderful coming to school. I have a lot of little friends--the children" (Sharla, April 16, p. 5).

> You get to know a lot of the kids when working in the classroom and it is nice when the kids remember me. They see me out on the street or in the shopping centre and you can hear them say "Hi, Mrs. Blair!" That makes me feel good and one girl always gives me a big hug when she sees me. So it makes me feel good. (Nancy, April 23, p. 3)

On-the-job volunteer relationships may well be integrated into the volunteers personal and social life. Jill mentioned, "It's a little bit like a family. Some parents maintain their friendship with other volunteers outside of the school setting and see each other socially " (June 5, p. 8).

Gain New or More Knowledge

The knowledge gained about how children learn and what they learn was a welcomed addition to all the parents' repertoire. Involvement was a means of learning for parents and they developed skills in working with their children at home. As Nancy said, "You learn a few tricks in working with your own kids at home" (April 23, p. 5). Even though the majority of the parents did not work in their child's classroom they still learned a great deal about children. The parents received a better understanding of their own child's learning behavior as well as gained information about activities which assist children's development. "I have realized that maybe the grass isn't always greener on the other side of the fence. When you work with a lot of other people's kids yours don't look so bad after all" (Jill, April 21, p. 6). Jill elaborated on this point,

> Some days you think, "Oh what is wrong with my child?" and then you learn that he is a perfectly normal eight year old because all the other children are doing the same thing and driving their parents insane. By working with other children you get a better understanding of why kids behave the way they do. (April 21, p. 7)

Getting involved gave Jill a better understanding of, and a different perspective on, her own child. As educators we must recognize the fact that parents need reassurrance that they are doing a good job of raising their children.

> I learn a lot about children by working with children in classrooms. It doesn't matter what grade, I learn some things that I think, 'Gee that would be a good thing for my three year old son.' These conferences we are invited to go on are wonderful. We come back with new ideas for working with children and more knowledge about children. (Sharla, April 24, p. 6)

> I learned from attending the Calgary conference that parents should ask the kids everyday what the highlight of their school day was, they always have an answer. We have a good conversation. It is important and a big deal for the kids. When I come in to volunteer on Friday they use it back on me and ask me what were the highlights of my day. (Sharla, April 16, p. 8-9)

A couple of parents felt that because they were gaining knowledge about how children learn and developing skills in working with children it allowed them to feel that they were able to do a better job in raising their children. "In a way it helps me to be a better parent" (Gwen, April 21, p. 1).

Enhanced Self-Esteem

These five parents continued to volunteer because their volunteer experience made them feel good about themselves.

"I'm learning. I'm needed and everyone feels that need to be needed or wanted. I have contributed, I am worth something, you know ! I am not just the 'house wife' who sits at home, does the housework, looks after the kids, and has supper on the table when hubby comes home"(Nancy, April 16, p. 7). "I come to the school and I feel useful in some way and then that makes me feel good" (Nancy, April 23, p. 4).

"I'm not doing it for the pay cheque, that doesn't bother me because I'm being welcomed and being made to feel that I'm worth something. That's a big deal for me" (Sharla, May 15, p. 3).

Parents who are meaningfully involved not only gain a greater insight into their own capabilities, but begin to gain confidence in their ability to be contributing members of the educational process. Morrison (1978) suggested that the feeling of self-worth will also carry over into the home and other activities in which the parent is involved. Jill explains,

> I'm learning I can do things I didn't think I would be able to do. For example, this is the first time I have coordinated a pot luck supper. It has given me confidence in myself and then when I question whether or not I can do something I ask myself, "Can I do it?" and the answer is, 'Sure, I will give it a try' (June 5, p. 2-3).

Louise, Jill, and Nancy indicated that they were not forced to volunteer. It was their choice to be involved in the school everyday and if it did not enhance their self-esteem they probably would not continue to volunteer.

Gwen feels good about herself because she has helped someone, "You can see results and progress that the children in the English as a Second Language class have made, you feel good about yourself" (April 21, p. 2).

One teacher participating in a survey conducted by Epstein and Becker (1982) had this to say, "I believe parent involvement is one of the keys to improving education, and it should be encouraged. It will not only promote better pupil performance but it will improve the self-image of each parent" (p. 110). According to the principals, community school coordinators, and teachers, the five parents that I worked with experienced a marked growth in self-esteem as a result of the valuable contributions they have made in the life of the school. Their feeling of self-worth has been enhanced as a result of their volunteering. The parents related that they have become more confident in themselves and their own abilities to do things.

> Children will come into the workroom and assume that I am one of the teachers. But because we are a community school and have the staff that we have, the children are taught that any adult is to be respected and be treated equally. It not only makes me feel welcome but makes me feel good. (Louise, April 14, p. 6)

Recognition

To be seen as a valuable "making a difference" person is important to all people. "I get things done and do make a difference" (Nancy, May 8, p. 2). Volunteers feel recognized when they see that they are an integral and important part of a successful system.

Nancy and I were sitting in the staffroom one morning chatting as she wrote names on some folders. The secretary walked in and said, "You are hard at work Nancy. That is what I call dedication." Then a parent sitting at the table with us said, "Oh she should get paid for all the work she does.". (May 1, F). But for Nancy, recognition in the form of hugs and smiles from the children is all she needs. "This one little girl gives me a hug when she sees me, so it makes me feel good" (Nancy, April 23, p. 3).

During an interview in April, Nancy shared with me her experience of being on the committee who interviewed candidates for the position of community school coordinator. She talked about the part she played in making the final decision as to who should be chosen for the position. Our conversation ended with the following statements:

> R: Do you have any other feelings about your experience of being on the selection committee?
>
> I: Well, it was . . . "hey gee they asked me" it really made me feel important . . . I was contributing. I don't want applause because what I'm doing is satisfying enough. I'm not out here to get badges and stuff like that. (April 23, p. 11).

Sharla feels one of the most rewarding accolades she can receive for her services is a verbal '"thank you" and a friendly smile from students, the teacher, and the principal.

> I just know I am going to be appreciated by spending time volunteering. Nobody here showers you with material things. It is just a smile or a friendly 'good morning.' You know that they do have a volunteer appreciation tea for us. But we don't expect that. That is just icing on the cake. Coming in here and knowing the kids want you here and knowing that as a whole you are helping the situation and learning yourself. It might sound silly but I am learning to help my children. It is refreshing for me! (April 24, p. 6)

Wilson (1979) mentioned that people must be awarded with things that are significant to each individual. There are volunteers who find pins, luncheons, or certificates truly meaningful. But one must remember not to assume that these are appropriate and significant for all volunteers. Jill commented, "A lot of us get quite uncomfortable with a lot of fanfare and a big ceremony. Thank you's are an ongoing process and you can see how well the student exchange went and the kids really enjoyed it and that is all you need" (June 5, p. 1). "I get paid by seeing the smiles on Jesse's face. Working with someone and they finally are getting the concept that I have tried to teach them" (Jill, May 12, p. 1).

Sense of Belonging

The five parents in my study maintained that the sense of belonging they experienced by being volunteers was one reason they continued to volunteer. They all benefited from that feeling of being welcomed and wanted.

> R: You mentioned that you really feel welcome and comfortable at this school. Could you give me a few examples of how such an atmosphere is created or who creates the atmosphere of allowing you to feel welcome.
>
> I: It's hard to say . . . how do I explain this (pause). I can go to Lethbridge and go into my relatives house and not feel as comfortable as I feel here. There is something here that clicks amongst the people. You mix . . . I can joke around with the people. (Nancy, May 8, p. 2)

Nancy continued to say, "I don't feel too homey in too many places, but here I feel homey. The staff makes me feel welcome. It's like a real home at this school" (May 8, p. 3). "I enjoy volunteering . . . I love being here. I'm not at home vegetating. I'm not a couch potato" (April 23, p. 3). I asked Nancy if there was anything in particular that would cause her to quit volunteering. She replied, "Things would have to get really, really unfriendly. As long as there is the warm and friendly atmosphere I will be here" (May 14, p. 8).

For Sharla, "coming in here and knowing that you are welcomed and knowing the kids want you here " (April 24, p. 6). It provides her with a sense of belonging. Sharla says, "I love the fact that I'm welcomed in the school" (April 16, p. 1). "I'm so thrilled that the school welcomes me with open arms and its not 'well I guess we will find a place for you.' They encourage you to be here" (April 16, p.4).

> You walk in here and everyone is so pleasant and helpful and it makes you want to be here and do whatever has to be done. It's a positive atmosphere. It's great to know that everyone is working as a team to better one another. Parents are learning alongside their children. (Jill, May 15, p. 5).

Louise noted, "We are always made to feel welcome. You can go into the staffroom anytime or have a cup of coffee. It is one of the concepts of the community school " (April 14, p. 9). "I enjoy it and if I didn't I wouldn't come. I really like it! It's something I like to get into" (April 21, p. 6).

Jill always feels very welcome at the school. "It is the very friendly atmosphere. You can walk in the school any time and they are not thinking 'What are you doing here? Why are you coming?.' They all assume that parents belong at the school and know we come for a very valid reason" (May 12, p. 3).

When I talked to Gwen about her moving to another province and I asked her if she would be a volunteer. She responded: "Well, it depends if I feel welcomed and wanted by the school staff. We are always made to feel welcomed here" (May 12, p. 5). In our discussion about parents who do not volunteer Gwen mentioned that many parents don't want to take that first step and try it. "If they got out just that one time they would realize that they are made to feel welcomed and not put into a situation where they are not wanted" (Gwen, May 12, p. 9).

It is evident that the parents in my study have experienced many benefits from volunteering in their children's school. The satisfaction of their experience has made it worthwhile for the parents to continue to volunteer.

Teachers', Principals', and Community School Coordinators' Perceptions of Parental Involvement

While the focus on the study was on the parents' perspective of involvement, some interesting and relevant comments were gleaned from school personnel.

Teachers that I interviewed or just had brief conversations with mentioned that parents must be given meaningful tasks that they enjoy doing. While parents sometimes need the teacher's expectations explicitly identified, they felt that it should be possible for each parent to contribute in a way most meaningful to her/him. Teachers felt that they need the support and understanding of the parent both in the classroom and the home to have a significant, positive result on children's school performance. They value the parents that take time to be involved and believe that just as teachers want to feel good about what they are doing, parents must feel good about what they are doing.

The teachers that I spoke with stressed that parent volunteering is a personal thing for parents just as it is for the teacher who is involving parents. The individual experiences that each parent and teacher brings to a situation makes each experience unique. If the program does not fit the needs of the parent and if they are not being personally satisfied they will not continue to volunteer. These teachers seemed aware of the parents feelings. It is important for educators to know the parent's needs and feelings so they can continue to provide them with tasks that result in a high level of parent satisfaction.

Teachers' Perceptions

A Grade one teacher at Lakeview School mentioned that "parents usually do not want to help plan special curricular activities, but it all depends on the group of parents. Maybe next year the parents volunteering in the classroom will want to do a lot of planning , you never know." She noted that,

> Parents volunteer because they may have the desire to work outside the home or return to the work force. Volunteering is a stepping stone for

> them. They also come because their children put pressure on them and they are glad they came because they find out what they really are capable of doing which leads to the development of a good self-image.

Another teacher said, "It is a real boast in self-confidence for many parents. They get a real sense of satisfaction because they have contributed to something very important. Oh! there are a few who are just here to check up on the teacher."

A sixth grade teacher made the following remark:

> Parents have some real insecurities and they do not want to come, but you try to get them to come to an evening get together and make them feel at home as much as possible. You have to do careful planning and establish routines and most parents have to know what it expected of them. They feel a lot better about themselves once they start volunteering.

A fourth grade teacher stated that,

> Our open door policy will show parents that we want parents to come. Parents really do grow personally. They feel important and as long as the staff is committed the volunteers will keep coming. Some parents want to enter back into the work force and volunteering in the school is one step toward that goal.

While the teachers in these two schools were very positive towards involving parents, they indicated that not all teachers share their perspective. One teacher shared that some teachers in other schools have a difficult time accepting the fact that parents should be directly involved in their child's school and feel that they are being pressured to have parents involved. They see it as another big responsibility to add to their already overwhelming list of responsibilities.

Community School Coordinators' Perceptions

Carole, the community school coordinator at Lakeview School, noted that parents continue to volunteer because,

> They begin to discover they are more capable then they realize and have skills they didn't know they had. Some parents come to check up on the teachers, they are mini spies, but there are only a few who have that as their major motivation.

During one of our discussions, Carole identified a concern that they usually get the same parents showing up at the school to volunteer and made the following comment:

> You get your doers, organizers, sit backers, and complainers, and the enjoyers who don't do anything. It is to their benefit that parents volunteer. They get an extra "bonus" because they are in the school volunteering on a regular bais. It allows them to get to know the teachers so, they have a better idea of which classroom they want their child in for the next year. But, then you get all the doers wanting their child in the same classroom.

Carole shared her concern about parent burn out.

> We can always count on certain parents. They always want to do more and more and don't realize how demanding it is and it puts pressure on at home and sometimes that has caused problems at home "Home Burnout". The husband burns up because his wife is doing too much volunteer work....Parents are really amazed at how hard teachers work it is not just a 9:00- 3:00 job. They come to appreciate the teacher more.

Matthew, the community school coordinator at Paradise Hill School asserted that parents really need to voice their concerns. He strongly believes that, "parent volunteers are concerned about what happens to their children at school and they need to voice their concerns and they should know that there is always someone on staff who will listen to them."

The following quotation summarizes the comments Matthew made concerning parents having a say in their children's education.

> Voice is essential to partnership. Without voice, "I" am nothing; Without voice also, there is no communication; therefore, "We" are nothing as well. Since education must be based on "I" and "We", educational partners must have a voice. So, when parents are given the voice they deserve and they use that voice from an enabling perspective, schools will improve and parents will feel better about themselves.

Matthew discussed the concern about certain groups of parents who do not participate in school events and the frustration that it sometimes causes the parents who faithfully attend meetings, go on field trips, and work at fundraising bingos. Matthew and the dedicated group of parents are working towards developing creative ways to overcome barriers to the group's participation.

Principals' Perceptions

Mr. Blair, the principal, at Lakeview Community School discussed the importance of encouraging his staff to "welcome volunteers, talk to them and make them feel at home." He maintained that,

> To have effective parent involvement you need a staff who are strong believers in the concept of parent involvement and are committed to working with parents as well as their children. The entire staff must compliment the parents when they have done a job, smile and say hi, and show an interest in them.

When I asked Mr. Blair the question, "Why do you think parents volunteer?" his response was, "Some parents come into the school to volunteer because they don't want to let go of their child and there are some who don't want to stay home alone and therefore come to interact with other adults here at school. " He voiced a concern that,

> there really is a push being made now to have parent volunteer programs in all schools. We cannot operate as a little ivory tower. We need to work with parents and the community. Getting the parents and the community involved is a way of bringing the public up to date on what is happening in education. Parents remember what school was like for them and feel schools today should just be like they were twenty years ago. It is difficult to change the system when the public is against change because they say it was good enough for them so it should be good enough now. They don't understand that we have to keep up to the changing society. But if parents come into the school, spend some time volunteering they know and understand what is going on and can discuss their concerns. It is very important to remember that the more informed parents are the more supportive they are. It is wrong to think keeping them out and we will avoid any trouble. When people are out there and they don't know what is going on, they are are the ones who gossip and are suspicious about what is happening. Working together with parents is the key to success.

Mr. Robinson, the principal at Paradise Hill School suggested that,

> We need more parent contact than just through field trips and track and field. We need to meet parents on a one to one basis and fulfill their individual needs. Parents really want to make a difference in the lives of others. They have that need of contributing. It is important to give parents a sense of ownership and power, once this happens the gains to the students and the parents themselves are tremendous. Volunteering is a positive experience for parents because they are being productive. It is also a form of social advancement and we have several volunteers who come for that reason.

Mr. Robinson stressed that the staff must have a deep interest in parents and an ability to relate to them on their own terms and in their own situations. He stated that, "we have to attend to those factors that will support involvement."

The comments made by the principals, teachers, and community school coordinators in most instances reinforce what the parents were saying. The educators that I spoke to stressed the importance of making sure that the parents are made to feel welcome and to the parents that was a key factor in their decision to continue to volunteer. All the educators that I talked to stressed that parent volunteers must feel at home, be able to have coffee whenever they choose to and not have to pay for it, and to feel like they are a part of the entire school family. All the parents stressed that if they were not made to feel welcome and that the staff did not really have a genuine interest in the parents they would not continue to volunteer. A sense of belonging was a strong motivator for parents to continue volunteering and the same feeling was shared by all the educators.

The principals, teachers, and community school coordinators agreed that the majority of parents who volunteer experience a marked growth in self-esteem. All the parents shared that their self-esteem increased as a result of their volunteer experience. The principals, teachers, and community school coordinators commented that in many cases the resulting increase in self-confidence leads parents back into the work force or helps parents get a job for the first time. A statement made by all the educators in both community schools was "getting out of the home and becoming involved in the school is a stepping stone for parents to get paid jobs." Nancy and Gwen shared the same statement about themselves.

Some of the teachers expressed that parents have some insecurities about being involved in school activities. They believe that if teachers are really committed to having parent volunteers in their classrooms then they have to be accepting of the parents needs and sensitive in dealing with the parents uncertainties about being involved.

The community school coordinators found that after parents have been volunteering for a couple of months they realize that they are more capable of doing different things than they thought and this incresed the parents self-esteem. All the parents alluded to this realization. The coordinators and principals believed that parents must voice their concerns and should be given the opportunity to become involved in the decision-making process of their children's education. The parents, indirectly, communicated the same thoughts but the teachers did not. In fact some teachers thought parents were not interested in being involved in decision-making in the areas of budgeting, curriculum planning, and school policy.

The principals and only one teacher pointed out that parents need to be recognized for the work that they do in the school and be complimented on the tasks accomplished. The sense of accomplishment, achievement, and recognition motivates the parents to continue to volunteer. Social interaction was a benefit resulting from all the parents' volunteer experience. This benefit was noted mainly by the principals.

One factor that was not mentioned by many of the educators is that involvement in the schools was a means of learning for parents. The gaining of new knowledge on how children learn and what techniques work in helping children learn was a major benefit to the parents in this study.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions

This chapter provides a summary and discussion of the findings. In addition, the implications and recommendations resulting from the study are discussed. Some suggestions for further research regarding parental involvement in schools is provided.

Summary and Discussion of Findings

Parents are no longer regarded (nor want to be regarded) as just fund-raisers for the school (although fund-raising is still a part of some parents involvement). The days of the hot dog and bake sale moms are quickly being replaced by informed parents who want to take a more active role in the education of their children. I discovered that parents are not just extensions of their children; they are fully functioning adults who have important contributions to make and "to confine their activities to bake sales would be tremendous waste of talent and energy" (Henderson, et. al, 1986, p. 58).

The parent volunteers that I worked with were intimately involved in the school for various reasons; they felt the need to establish a rapport with their child's teacher; were curious about what was happening at school; and wanted to be a part of their child's schooling. The parents felt it was important that they display an interest since they were role models for their children. Most of the parents in my study saw getting out and being at the school a welcome change from housework and it provided them with opportunities to

interact with other adults. One of the reasons that was emphasized by all the parents was the desire to help their child, the teachers, and the school. As Emerson once said, "It is one of the most beautiful compensations in life that no man can sincerely help another without helping himself" (Gidron, 1978, p. 32).

Parents were involved in a variety of tasks which they enjoyed doing. These tasks included clerical work, tutoring, planning and organzing fund-raising, helping teachers in unit planning, going on field trips, and attending various meetings which included budget decision-making meetings. (See Appendix B for a detailed list of tasks). If for some reason they did not enjoy doing the acitvity, they would ask to be assigned other tasks that fulfilled their needs.

The parents participated in five different types of roles in their children's education. The first role was the basic obligations of providing their children with food, clothing, and shelter. The second was a collaborative role in which the parents attended parent-teacher interviews and supported in the home what was happening at their children's school. A major aspect of this role is to help school personnel resolve problems that might arise with a child's learning or behavior. The third role, was that of being an audience where the parents attended and appreciated their children's Christmas concerts, track and field days, and picnics. In the fourth role as supporters, all the parents were actively present in the school, helping in the classroom, making learning materials, typing, and assisting in many other ways. The fifth role included activities where parents voiced their opinions and jointly made decisions with school personnel about their children's schooling. They became co-decision makers in a number of areas.

The parents in my study shared their varied skills and talents. They were dedicated volunteers and played important roles in their children's schooling. Margaret Mead speaks eloquently of people like this:

> We live in a society that depends upon many kinds of volunteers--some who give time, some who give money, some who give freely of their special skills and talents, full-time or part-time. If we look closely we will see that almost everything that matters to us, almost anything that embodies our commitment to the way human lives should be lived and cared for, depends upon some form--and most often many forms --of volunteerism. (in Alden, 1979, p. 80)

The parents felt that the benefits accrued from volunteering and the reasons they continued to volunteer were: to gain a feeling of achievement, for social interaction, to gain new or more knowledge, and to gain an enhanced self-esteem through the recognition received, and to enhance their sense of belonging at the school.

Morrison (1978) writes of benefits to parents that are not readily observable or easily documented. Many of these benefits related to the affective domain and have to do with how people feel and concerns their interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships. For example, a sense of achievement for the parents in my study came from such things as reading a story to a child, helping a student learn their times tables, organizing the school bake sale, and compiling students' stories into a big book.

Another benefit Morrison discussed was social interaction. The parents in my study expressed their desire to continue to be involved because it provided them with the opportunity to have company, to see other people, and to talk with other people. Gaining new knowledge and adding to their knowledge was mentioned by the parents as a satisfying result of their volunter experience. Gaining new knowledge not only helped them be a better parent but, in some of the cases it had an impact on their future whether it was to find a job or to go back to school. This gaining of new skills may well have led to an improved feeling of self-worth of the parents in my study.

Carol Seefeldt (1985) speaks of parent involvement as a vehicle for enhancing and affirming the self esteem of parents. Morrison (1978) also claims that the self-image of the

parent is enhanced through parent involvement in schools which was certainly the case in this study. All the parents in my study concured that as a result of volunteering they gained self-confidence, felt better about themselves, and experienced a marked growth in their self-esteem. They attributed this in most cases to having helped another human being.

Volunteers are not paid, but they still expect some kind of compensation. This compensation is usually intangible and difficult to define but still very real (Henderson, 1980). According to Mulligan (1979) "volunteers work for free, but not for nothing" (p.26). This axiom means that the volunteers must feel that their services are needed and worth their time and effort if they are to continue.

The improved self-image gained from helping someone else, the feeling of using their time constructively, an increased motivation for learning new skills, the stimulation from having a stake in the success and well-being of another person are ways in which the parents in my study benefited. These were major reasons for them to continue volunteering.

Since getting and keeping parent volunteers is essential to effective education, we must be sure to find out not only what attracts parents to be involved, but, acknowledge what encourages them to continue to volunteer. J. Donald Philips, President of Hillsdale College, Hillsdale, Michigan, lends some insight to the motivation of the volunteer with the following summary:

If you want my loyalty, interests and best efforts, remember that....

1. I need a SENSE OF BELONGING, a feeling that I am honestly needed for my total self, not just for my hands, nor because I take orders well.

2. I need to have a sense of sharing in planning our objectives. My need will be satisfied only when I feel that *my* ideas have had a fair hearing.

3. I need to feel that the goals and objectives arrived at are *within reach* and that they make sense to *me*.

4. I need to feel that what I'm doing has *real purpose* or contributes to human welfare--that its value extends even beyond my personal gain, or hours.

5. I need to share in *making the rules* by which, together, we shall live and work toward our goals.

6. I need to know in some clear detail just what is expected of me--not only my detailed task but where I have opportunity to make personal and final decisions.

7. I need to have some *responsibilities that challenge*, that are within range of my abilities and interest, and that contribute toward reaching my assigned goal, and that cover all goals.

8. I need to *see* that *progress* is being made toward the goals we have set.

9. I need to be kept informed. What I'm not *up* on, I may be *down* on. (Keeping me informed is one way to give me status as an individual.)

10. I need to have confidence in my superiors--confidence based upon assurance of consistent fair treatment, or recognition when it is due, and trust that loyalty will bring increased security.

In brief, it really doesn't matter how much sense *my part* in this organization makes to *you*--I must feel that the whole deal makes sense to me! (Henderson, 1980, p. 64).

Implications and Recommendations

The parents that I studied were committed volunteer parents in community schools that encouraged and nutured parent involvement. Although this is not the situation in all

school and cannot be generalizable, I am confident in making the following recommendations and feel they would apply in most school situations.

1. Parent volunteers need to be recognized, thanked, and appreciated. Teachers, principals, and coordinators have to regularly communicate this to parents, not just feel it. Recognition does not need to be a formal process. It can be as simple as a note of thanks in the school newsletter, a "happy gram", a positive statement such as "thank you for assisting me today during the art activity", or a smile which to many people conveys friendliness better than any other single act. While one form of recognition may be important to one parent volunteer, it may be meaningless to another. Administrators and teachers must try to see that each volunteer receives the kind of recognition that means something personally.

2. Educators need to be be careful not to view the school and home as isolated from one another, but rather see the home, school, and community as integral inter-related parts of the children's world. The discussions pertaining to why parents got involved initially, focused on the parents wanting to establish rapport with the teachers. Parents felt that developing a good rapport with their child's teacher resulted in a sense of continuity between home and school.

3. Parents need to be viewed as colaborators in the education process. Parent involvement cannot be effective if educators see it as an attachment or a supplement to mainstream educational activities. Rather, such involvement must be incorporated into the mainstream of education. Jill commented,

> It is set up to be a partnership. The teacher makes the plans and defines for us the goals for working with each child and how the goals and the needs of the students should be met. We take if from there and report back what we have done (May 12, p. 7).

This type of environment is fostered through open communication between educators and parents. They must reach out to each other and recognize that schools are

much more effective when a "partnership in the education of children exists" (Friesen, 1986, p. 15). School volunteer programs succeed when teachers really want the help of school volunteers and when they and the volunteers become co-workers and effective partners in the educational team.

4. The school should recognize its responsibility to form a partnership with all parents in the school, but not simply those most easily available. This includes finding suitable alternative ways of involving parents who work outside the home, divorced parents, and minority families of different race and language.

5. Educators need to keep in mind that volunteers work best in a friendly, warm atmosphere, where their efforts are obviously appreciated. The staff can create such an atmosphere by their attitudes, by seeing that the volunteers are made to feel part of the working family, by expressing appreciation when it is deserved, by treating each volunteer as an individual human being, by remembering the small thoughtful things that make each person feel a special individual. Thus school staff should discover the individual needs of parents and learn about their intersts and capabilities rather than think of parents collectively. This means being more sensitive to the parents' needs and asking parents how they would like to become involved.

6. The strength and quality of parent involvement in the school will be largely determined by the attitudes and behaviors of the school staff. It is important for a school staff's commitment to involving parents in their children's education be genuine and positive. It is necessary to reach out to parents and be concerned about what the school can offer the parents.

7. A volunteer program will only survive if the volunteers feel it is worthwhile to both the school and to their own growth and satisfaction. Parents may have quite different

needs and expectations so, feedback from parents as to how they are personally benefiting from being involved must be solicited throughout the year.

8. I recommend that all teachers should receive training in the area of parent involvement. Teachers must be prepared to work with parents before they start teaching. The information discovered in this study should be useful to teacher training professionals who are trying to help prospective teachers learn how to work more effectivey with parents. Teacher educators must begin to develop competencies for teachers which will enable them to reach out to the community and involve parents. Some possible competencies expected of teachers working with parents are, to be aware of parents' needs and why they volunteer, to define and explain specific meaningful tasks for parents, to bring individual parents together and facilitate their addressing concerns, and to learn how to develop effective working relationships with parents.

Often it is difficult to get parents to come out for the first time as they may be experiencing insecurities and fear of the unknown. Teachers need to know how to communicate with these parents, and stimulate parent interest and prepare them for participation in their child's schooling.

9. Since many parents volunteer in order to begin the process of entering into the work force, schools might consider working cooperatively with agencies such as The Employment Centre in providing meaningful training for them. Training in the areas of communication and human relations skills may be of value to many parent volunteers. Such training will not only improve a school volunteer but may also provide such personal benefits as more effective parenting and more worth as a potential employee.

It was pointed out in a number of discussions that I had with parents and principals that the changing role of women has increased their desire to particpate in the world beyond their homes. It was mentioned several times in my study that school volunteerism can

provide an ideal transition period for women if the tasks the parent volunteers participated in were rewarding.

10. Effort must be redirected to involve families in children's education. For some time early childhood educators have been concerned about developing a child-centered education program and I recommend that we extend that focus and begin developing family-centered programs. Effort must be redirected to involve families in children's education and in order to do this we must go beyond the school setting. This would require an understanding of the wide range of family life styles. Henderson (1988) supports my concern,

> "I am suggesting that the standard view of learning process is too limited. Learning doesn't begin in the classroom and end at the edge of the playground. We must come to see that families provide the context in which children learn and are motivated to learn, and that schools and parents are collaborators in that process." (p.62)

Educators must realize that effective parent involvement will not come about overnight. They must however be optimistic and believe that virtually all parents, in time, can be reached in some way.

Suggestions for Further Research

The results of this study indicates the need for research to be done in some specific areas concerning parental involvement. The purpose of this section is to pose some questions that would give focus to further research.

1. What kind of training is being provided for undergraduates at universities in Canada? What kind of inservices are being provided for teachers to effectively involve parents? How do we find out how teachers and administrators can be educated in preservice and inservice programs to obtain and update their understanding of school and family connections?

2. What effect does a parents' volunteering have on the family? Do they have a more intact family structure than compared to those who do not volunteer?

3. Parents are starting to take a more important role in the education of their children. Parents enjoy and continue to attend open house, they go to conferences about their children's progress, they assist with school trips, they participate in fundraisers, and they support school needs. However, they are starting to extend that involvement into voicing their concerns about the school budgets, and are helping develop the school's curriculum, and, as one parent did in my study, serve on the selection committee to hire school staff. How much parent involvement is desirable and to what extent should parents become involved in schools?

4. How do teacher's really feel about working with parents and what are their perceptions of why parents volunteer and how they benefit? What additional skills, expertise, and time is required by teachers to effectively involve parents?

5. In three years time how would the five parents in this study feel about volunteering? Would they have broadened their participation or would they have burned out? If so what are the reasons?

6. While the positive effects of parent involvement have been documented in the preschool and elementary grades, what about the junior high and high school levels? Has nothing been written because there is very little parental involvement in upper grades? If this is the case, why is this so?

Although much of the research supports the value of parental participation, little research has been done in regard to the real needs and expectations of the parents as perceived by the parents themselves. Through observing and actively participating in the daily activities of five parent volunteers in two community schools I discovered why these

parents initially volunteer and recorded all the tasks they were involved in. Through interviewing the parents I was able to identify the benefits they receive as a result of volunteering and how these were basic to continued involvement. From discussions with teachers, principals, and community school coordinators I came to a better understanding of what educators need to know about how parents feel about their volunteer experience.

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

The research project entitled, "Parent Volunteers: Five Parents'Perspectives", to be conducted by Marilyn Ann Mochoruk, graduate student form the University of Alberta has been explained to me.

I understand that my participation involves engaging in several dialogical interviews and allowing the researcher to observe and participate as I perform my duties as a parent volunteer.

Additionally, I understand that all information provided by me will be kept confidential and my identity will not be revealed. Pseudonyms will be used for my name, the school's name and other names I may mention.

I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in the study at any time.

It is my understanding that the final report of this study will be a thesis for the degree master of education. I further understand that all questions I have about the study will be answered by the researcher.

On the basis of the above statements, I agree to participate in this project and give the researcher permission to print quotations from the field notes and interviews in the final report.

_____ _____

Participant's Signature Researcher's Signature

_____

Date

APPENDIX B

TASKS ASSIGNED TO PARENT VOLUNTEERS

The tasks that parents participated in were placed in the following categories:

1. General Non-Instructional

Some of the parents volunteered on a regular basis to call the homes of the children who were absent from school. One parent spent most of her volunteers hours carding and shelving books in the library and assisting with the yearly inventory of the library. All the parents were room representatives and did the specified duties of a room representative which included attending parent advisory council meetings and phoning parents to inform them of upcoming school events. The parents identified school needs, set school goals, evaluated their effectiveness, developed and revised budget priorities, developed school policies on parent-related or child-related matters such as homework, discipline, and codes of behavior, and attended curriculum development meetings. Some of the parents supervised children in lunch room, computer room, and library. One of the parents stayed in touch with local politics, wrote letters to government officials concerning school budgets, and attended school board meetings.

2. Clerical

Most of the parents duplicated materials. Some typed and filed documents while others laminated materials, coloured pictures, cut out letters, compiled the school newsletter, compiled students' stories into a big book, and made signs and posters for school events.

3. Field Trips

Parents assisted on many field trips,: MacDonalds, horse stables, the park, the swimming pool and the community health unit. Some parents planned the entire field trips.

4. Classroom Assistant

All the parents in my study worked as classroom assistants. Children dictated their stories to the parent and she wrote them out. They circulated around the room to answer students' questions. The parents worked with children individually or in groups doing such things as reading to the children and listening to them read, matching shapes, and playing math games. Several of the parents shared special interests, culture, or occupations in different classrooms. The parents prepared and distributed snack, put up bulletin boards, set up learning centers, got paints ready for art activities, helped rearrange the classroom. The majority of the parents prepared various classroom materials.

5. Tutoring

Parents would work one-to-one with a child who would be taken out of the classroom by the parent. The parent would help the student with reading, writing, spelling and math difficulties that they were experiencing.

6. Planning and Organizing Fund Raising and Community School Events

All the parents in my study participated in organizing fund raising events. Some examples are: breakfast with Santa, garage sale, bake sale, spring tea, and book fair. They were actively involved in planning school events such as student exchanges, fall round up, skating party, ice carnival, games night, coffee klatches and guest lectures, pancake breakfast, potluck dinner, community dance, Valentine social, and school board meetings.